

# ***Knowing Our God***

Advanced Exegetical Theology

*The Knowledge of God Series*

## **Book 15**

# **Bible Translations**

*Recommended Versions & Resources for  
Scripture Study*

Kurt Jurgensmeier

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All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) 1994 edition unless otherwise noted. NIV is a registered trademark of the International Bible Society.

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## **Dedication**

To my mom who has served me in sacrificial ways that only God can reward.



# Contents

The chapters below are marked with the following categories in order to help you prioritize your reading:

- ◆ **Best:** The most helpful, interesting and/or important chapters.
- ◆ **Essential:** Important chapters to understand the topic of the book.
- ◇ **Specialized:** The finer, more complex points of the topic of the book.

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## Preface

### *Helping the next generation of Bible Teachers*

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**Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.** (2 Tim 2:15)

These words were written to a young Teacher of God's word. They are a reminder of the awesome privilege, responsibility, and accountability that comes with such a divine calling. Being a Teacher is God's gift to a man, but what kind of Teacher he becomes is his gift to God. And God tells all Teachers something of what He is expecting in the verse above.

First, the Teacher is to "**present**" himself "**to God**" when he teaches. When we teach it is not only humans that are listening, but Heaven as well, and God is our most important audience. We can be concerned with what people will think of our teaching, but we need to be much, much more concerned with what God will think.

And God's expectations can significantly differ from those of humans. People often expect eloquence and entertainment, God expects accuracy, "**correctly**" interpreting, teaching, and applying God's word for God's people. There is nothing in all the world more important than this because to do otherwise is to misunderstand, misrepresent, and eventually disobey the Author.

As in all human endeavors, not even God expects perfection, but He certainly demands that we do our "**best**." We need to remember that we do all of this under the watchful eye of the Author Himself, and will one Day be either "**approved**" or "**ashamed**" regarding how careful and diligent we were in working to understand, teach, and apply His word "**correctly**."

This book is offered as a help in obeying the Apostle's command for those who have, or desire to have, the great responsibility of teaching God's word to His people. It is part of a series of books written under the title of ***Knowing Our God: Advanced Exegetical Theology***.

These books are *advanced* in that they are an in-depth, scholarly study of very specific and often difficult theological topics.

They are uniquely *exegetical* in that there is a special emphasis on interpreting the Scriptures applicable to the topic. While many

systematic theologies would not require much of a Scripture index, a large percentage of the current 5000 pages of *Knowing Our God* is commentary on Scripture.

Finally, these books are *theology*, because it is in such an endeavor that we bring the pieces of God's word into a harmonious whole in order to produce the full truth of Scripture. We believe *Advanced Exegetical Theology* is a great need in equipping Pastors today to defend the faith for this and future generations.

Ezra the priest, of course, is our example, of whom it is written: **"the gracious hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel"** (Ezra 7:9-10). Obeying God's word was obviously important to Ezra, but so was being **"devoted . . . to the study"** of God's word, all so that he could be **"teaching"** it to God's people. It is our hope that this book will help you do just that.

Finally, a few practical points. First, while we are not aware of anything in it that would be contrary to the historical, Evangelical Christian faith, if you encounter something that differs from the beliefs of your Pastor(s), please discuss it with them if it causes serious questions for you. We desire to respect the pastoral authority God has in your life as much as possible.

Secondly, studying God's word is best pursued in community with spiritual peers, and we encourage you to read this with others and discuss the ***Gauging Your Grasp*** questions usually at the end of a chapter.

Thirdly, we make an effort to make an organized study of God's word not just theological but practical as well. So prayerfully consider the sections entitled ***Pastoral Practices*** along the way.

Fourth, as you read you will notice several references to other writings. This reflects the fact that this book is an excerpt from a larger production entitled *Knowing Our God*. The entire collection of books on systematic theology that are currently available can be found at [www.trainingtimothys.org](http://www.trainingtimothys.org).

Finally, we would appreciate the reader visiting the site and emailing us any feedback on this book, including concerns, comments, and any proposed corrections. We too wish to study God's word in community, and that community includes you.

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## Chapter 15.1

# Introduction to Bible Translations

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### *Table of Topics*

**A) What Makes a Good Bible Translation?**

**B) Neglecting the second half of Bible translation: *Good English***

**C) Four Types of Bible Translations**

*Extras & Endnotes*

Table 15.1: Popular Bible Translations in Order of Translation Philosophy

**Primary Points**

- At a foundational level, the best Bible translation is one that most accurately translates the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts into *your language*.
- An English Bible translation should not only be rejected if it erroneously reflects the ancient languages, but it should also be rejected if it uses bad English.
- We have made incredible advances in the accuracy and understanding of our ancient Scripture texts. But if we want to continue to improve the accuracy and value of English Bible translations, there is something that needs attention far more than any further improvements regarding these ancient languages. What is needed now is considerable advancements in our understanding and communication of the English language.
- Approaches to Bible translation can generally be categorized on a spectrum in four ways: "literal," "dynamic," "mediating," and paraphrase.
- "Literal" translations like the NASB and ESV attempt to translate a Greek or Hebrew word with one corresponding English word and follow the original sentence structure as well.

## A) What Makes a Good Bible Translation?

God did not speak His word to the Apostles and Prophets in every language, but the language of those He was speaking to which included Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Accordingly, it has been the duty of His people to translate these ancient languages into those of people today. This is a monumental task, and one that some claim is impossible.

However, along these lines, Joshua Whatmough pokes fun at linguists when he writes: "Those experts who know Hopi [American Indian], Eskimo, or Aranta, and begin by insisting that this or that feature is incapable of English expression, always ends up by explaining it in English."<sup>1</sup>

Thank God that He has created both humans and language with a foundation in reason so that the meaning of the thoughts of one race of humans can be fully translated into the language of another.

<sup>2</sup>

The English speaking Christian is blessed to have an abundance of translations of the Bible. Below are the top 10 best-selling English translations as of January 2012:

- 1 New International Version (NIV, 2011 update)<sup>3</sup>
- 2 King James Version (KJV)
- 3 New King James Version (NKJV)
- 4 New Living Translation (NLT)
- 5 English Standard Version (ESV)
- 6 Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)
- 7 New International Readers Version (NIVr)
- 8 The Message (Msg)
- 9 New American Standard Bible (1995 update) (NASB)
- 10 Common English Bible (CEB)<sup>4</sup>

Which one of these translations is the best? While that is not a simple question, let's start simple. At a foundational level, the best

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<sup>1</sup> *Language, a Modern Synthesis*, (New American Library, 1957), 198.

<sup>2</sup> For further discussion on the rational basis for language and human communication see section 2.4.F.

<sup>3</sup> All quotes and references to the NIV refer to the latest edition rendered in 2011. For more on the history of the NIV see section ?

<sup>4</sup> Source: [http://www.cbaonline.org/nm/documents/BSLs/Bible\\_Translations.pdf](http://www.cbaonline.org/nm/documents/BSLs/Bible_Translations.pdf)

Bible translation is one that most accurately translates the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts into *your language*. In other words it is a *reliable* translation of the original language into a *readable* version of your language. We like how Mark Strauss, Professor of NT at Bethel Seminary, and a member of several Bible translation committees, puts it:

The best translation should not sound like a translation, but an original composition which has the same meaning and impact upon contemporary readers that the original had on the original readers.<sup>5</sup>

Or as Dr. Strauss with the renowned NT scholar Gordon Fee writes:

The goal of good translation is English, not Greekish (or Biblish). Biblish results when the translator simply replaces Hebrew or Greek words with English ones, without sufficient concern for natural or idiomatic English. . . . No one speaking English in the real world would use the expression.”<sup>6</sup>

Elsewhere, Dr. Strauss puts it more simply: “Biblish is produced when the translator tries to reproduce the form of the Greek or Hebrew without due consideration for how people actually write or speak [today].”<sup>7</sup> We’ll see numerous examples of this throughout this book.

So, a good Bible translation not only reliably reflects the ancient language, but also reflects common 21<sup>st</sup> century English usage. In other words, contrary to many Evangelicals, an English Bible translation should not only be rejected if it erroneously reflects the ancient languages, but it should also be rejected if it uses bad English. This is because the best Bible translation is one that most accurately translates the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts into *your language*.

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<sup>5</sup> Mark L. Strauss, “Form, Function, and the “Literal Meaning” Fallacy in Bible Translation,” 30; available online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/Strauss.LiteralFallacy.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Fee and Mark L. Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions* (Zondervan, 2007), 4, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Mark L. Strauss, “Why the English Standard Version (ESV) should not become the Standard English Version”; online at:

<http://betterbibles.com/2008/11/21/why-the-english-standard-version-esv-should-not-become-the-standard-english-version-by-mark-strauss/>.

## **B) Neglecting the Second Half of Bible Translation: *Good English***

Over the last many decades there has been an enormous amount of work done on the first half of translation, but many Evangelicals have fallen behind on the second, and equally important half of Bible translation. Hundreds of scholars have meticulously researched thousands of ancient manuscripts to establish our Hebrew and Greek texts of Scripture. Likewise, thousands of scholars have invested decades in studying these ancient, even extinct, languages so that we may properly understand the ancient texts. So why do so many Bible translations use lousy modern English?

Because we have focused on the first half of Bible translation and neglected the second half. We have made incredible advances in the accuracy and understanding of our ancient Scripture texts. But if we want to continue to improve the accuracy and value of English Bible translations, there is something that needs attention far more than any further improvements regarding these ancient languages. What is needed now is considerable advancements in our understanding and communication of the English language. Accordingly, Dr. Strauss says something that should be obvious to all:

Asking the simple question, "Would anyone speaking English actually say this?" is a good test for standard English. This simple question could transform our Bible versions and bring them in line with the finest translation practices used around the world.<sup>8</sup>

This is why we applaud the translation committee of the NIV for engaging in unprecedented research on modern English usage. The Chairman of the NIV translation committee, Douglas Moo, Professor of NT at Wheaton, writes:

Prior to the update of the New International Version of the Bible (NIV) for 2011, all previous Bible translation efforts have been hampered by the lack of accurate, statistically significant data on the state of spoken and written English at a given time in its history. . . . Working with some of the world's leading experts in computational linguistics and using cutting-edge techniques developed specifically for this project, the [NIV translation] committee gained an authoritative, and hitherto

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

unavailable, perspective on the contemporary use of [the English] language.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, many American Evangelicals continue to promote Bible translations that use bad English. And it is a recognition of this defect that has brought the two most heated debates concerning Bible translation to the fore: 1) "literal" vs. "dynamic" philosophy of translation, and 2) Gender-inclusive language. The first issue involves the debate as to whether a more literal ("word for word," formal equivalence) or dynamic ("thought for thought" functional equivalence) approach to translation is the best. The second debate regards whether or not traditional biblical references to "man" or "men" that actually refer to people in general, including males and females, should be changed. We will discuss both of these issues in chapter 15.2 and 15.3 respectively, and then discuss the strengths and weaknesses of various versions in chapter 15.4.

### C) Four Types of Bible Translations

Approaches to translating Scripture can generally be divided into two: 1) literal ("word for word," formal equivalency), and 2) dynamic ("thought for thought," functional equivalency). Drs. Fee and Strauss explain:

Formal equivalence, also known as "literal" or "word-for-word" translation, seeks to retain the form of the Hebrew or Greek while producing basically understandable English. This goal is pursued for both words and grammar. Concerning words, formal equivalent versions try to use the same English word for a particular Greek or Hebrew word whenever possible.

For example, formal equivalent versions like the NASB [1995 updated NASB] and NKJV seek to translate the Greek term *sarx* consistently with the English word "flesh." [even though it can mean several different things]. Formal equivalence ["literal" translation] also seeks to reproduce the grammar or syntax of the original text as closely as possible.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Douglas Moo, "Summary of Collins Corpus Report," online at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/information/collins-corpus-report/>.

<sup>10</sup> Fee & Strauss, *Translation*, Kindle Locations 298-299.

Regarding dynamic or “thought for thought” translation, the authors write:

While formal equivalence [“literal” translation] follows the form of the original text, functional equivalence [“thought for thought” translation], also known as idiomatic or meaning-based translation, seeks to reproduce its meaning in good idiomatic (natural) English. . . .

Advocates of functional equivalence stress that the translation should sound as clear and natural to the contemporary reader as the original text sounded to the original readers.<sup>11</sup>

To illustrate the difference between “literal” and “dynamic” translations we can compare the English Standard Version (ESV) with the New Living Translation (NLT) of Matthew 6:34:

**ESV: Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.**

**NLT: So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.**

Notice how the “literal” translation of the ESV holds closely to the sentence content and structure of the original Greek, even though it produces rather awkward English. Notice as well how the “dynamic” translation of the NLT is more “thought for thought,” which, while representing the meaning of the Greek text accurately, also puts it in better English.

In addition to these two basic categories of approaches to Bible translation, it is helpful to add two others: 1) mediating- using both literal and dynamic approaches, and 2) paraphrase. The first is described by Drs. Fee and Strauss:

Mediating versions like Today’s NIV, NAB, HCSB, and NET are sometimes more literal, sometimes more idiomatic, seeking to maintain a balance between form and function.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon Fee and Mark L. Strauss, “It’s All Greek to Me: Translating God’s Word Into Today’s Language”, 9; online at <http://www.biblicadirect.com/p-960-its-all-greek-to-me-leaflet.aspx>.

Accordingly, the NIV renders Matthew 6:34: **“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”** In general, “mediating” versions are more “dynamic” than “literal.”

The paraphrase category is more difficult to distinguish from the “thought for thought” approach. We appreciate how the NLT translators have described the difference when they divide the approaches into three:

**Essentially Literal** (free only where absolutely necessary):

This philosophy is reluctant to “clarify” the meaning of the text, though it is open to doing so when absolutely necessary for understanding.

**Dynamic Equivalent** (free where helpful to clarify meaning):

This philosophy is open to “clarify” the meaning of the text whenever a literal rendering of the text might be confusing to the normal, uninitiated reader. This does not mean it deviates from the text; on the contrary, it does whatever is helpful to ensure that the text’s meaning comes through in English. In general, such translations try to balance the concerns of both functional equivalence and literal approaches.

**Paraphrase** (free for clarity and to catch attention):

This method is normally used by an individual translator, while the other methods usually employ committees of scholars. Creativity and style are extremely important here; the translator sometimes tries to catch the attention of readers in a fresh way, seeking to jolt and surprise them into understanding.

The most popular paraphrase is The Message Bible (Msg) by Eugene Peterson. Accordingly, someone has described the purpose of the Message Bible as: “to present something new and provocative at every turn, something vivid and unusual, in order to stir up the dull minds of people who have become bored with their familiar Bibles.”<sup>13</sup>

Accordingly, note the differences between the NIV and Msg in John 1:14:

NIV: The **Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.**

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Marlowe online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/themessage.html>.

Msg: The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.

We summarize and illustrate these descriptions, by placing popular Bible translations in the following categories in Table 15.1 below in *Extras & Endnotes*. The versions in bold text are our favorites for reasons that will be explained throughout this book. Nevertheless, while categorizing translations along these lines is helpful, the difficulties of dogmatically doing so should be recognized. Dr. Strauss comments:

Since all Bible translation utilizes both formal and functional equivalence, it is impossible to simply categorize versions as either one or the other. All translations exist on a continuum between form and function. The *New International Version*, the most popular version in the English speaking world, claims to be a middle-of-the-road or mediating version between these two translation theories. Indeed, most contemporary English versions profess to seek the perfect balance between accuracy and readability.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Strauss, "Form".

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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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**Table 15.1:** <sup>15</sup>

**Popular Bible Translations in Order of Translation Philosophy**

Type	Version
<b>Literal</b>	<b>New American Standard Bible- 1995 update (NASB)</b>
	King James Version (KJV)
	New King James Version (NKJV)
	English Standard Version (ESV)
	Revised Standard Version (RSV)
<b>Mediating</b>	New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
	Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)
	New English Translation (NET)
	<b>New International Version (NIV)</b>
	New English Bible (NEB)
<b>Dynamic</b>	New Century Version (NCV)
	<b>New Living Translation (NLT)</b>
	Contemporary English Version (CEV)
<b>Paraphrase</b>	The Living Bible (TLB)
	The Message Bible (Msg)

### **Gauging Your Grasp**

- 1) What in our opinion makes the best Bible translation? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 2) What aspect of Bible translation do we suggest has been neglected compared to other aspects? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 3) What four general categories of translation philosophy have we suggested? Give examples of each.

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<sup>15</sup> Basic source for table information is Fee & Strauss, "Greek," 9.

- 4) How do we describe the difference between a "literal" and a "dynamic" translation approach to Scripture?
- 5) How do we distinguish "dynamic" translations from paraphrases? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) Why do we claim that the more "literal" translations are not even the best "study Bible"?
- 7) What do we believe are the advantages of "dynamic" translations? Do you agree or disagree and why?

### **Recommended Reading**

- *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions*, Gordon Fee and Mark L. Strauss, (Zondervan, 2007). D. A. Carson writes: "Yet another book on translation? Yes, and this is the one I shall now recommend . . . this is the book on translation that deserves widest circulation." Available in Kindle version at [http://www.amazon.com/How-Choose-Translation-Worth-Understanding/dp/0310278767/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1327150816&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/How-Choose-Translation-Worth-Understanding/dp/0310278767/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1327150816&sr=1-1).
- "It's All Greek to Me: Translating God's Word Into Today's Language," Gordon Fee and Mark L. Strauss. A shorter version of the book above available free online at <http://www.biblicadirect.com/p-960-its-all-greek-to-me-leaflet.a.spx>.
- "Why the English Standard Version (ESV) Should Not Become the Standard English Version," Mark L. Strauss, Professor of NT at Bethel Seminary (San Diego). Illustrates many of the weaknesses of the ESV. Available online at:  
<http://zondervan.typepad.com/files/improvingesv2.pdf>
- "Form, Function, and the "Literal Meaning" Fallacy in Bible Translation," Mark Strauss. Available online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/Strauss.LiteralFallacy.pdf>.
- There are several interesting and current discussions at [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) regarding translation issues and Bible versions. See for example: "Should the Bible Be Readable or Accurate? (Why Not Both?) at:

<http://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2011/10/should-the-bible-be-readable-or-accurate-why-not-both>.

- Also check out the “Translation Forum” for short articles from Douglas Moo, Craig Blomberg, Richard Pratt and others on controversies regarding modern translations. Online at <http://www.biblegateway.com/perspectives-in-translation>.

### **Publications & Particulars**



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## Chapter 15.2

# The Superiority of Dynamic Bible Translations

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### Table of Topics

- A) Evaluation of the “Literal” Approach to Bible Translation:**  
*NASB & ESV*
- B) Evaluating Bible Paraphrases:** *The Message*
- C) The Superiority of Dynamic “Thought for Thought” Bible Translations:** *NIV & NLT*
- D) Errors, Exaggerations, & Even Slander by Critics of Dynamic Translations:** *Piper, Packer, & MacArthur*
  - D.1) The Errors of John Piper
  - D.2) The exaggeration of J. I. Packer
  - D.3) The slander by John MacArthur

*Extras & Endnotes*

### **Primary Points**

- We do not even accept the common notion that a more “literal” translation is the best “study Bible.”
- “Literal” translations often obscure the meaning.
- Paraphrases often depart from the original text too far and should be read as biblical *sermons* or devotions, rather than Scripture itself.
- Experience in foreign countries and a basic understanding of linguistics will rather immediately convince a person that good translation *must* be “thought for thought,” rather than “literal.”
- If this incongruence exists between modern languages that are related to one another (e.g. English, French, Spanish), imagine the disparity between languages that originate in different millenniums and continents like Hebrew, Greek, and English.
- Dynamic translations are simply better able to bring out the full intended meaning of the original authors of Scripture because the ancient text “said” many things to the original readers which the modern reader cannot infer through a simple replacement of words.
- Martin Luther’s approach to translation: “I must let the literal words go and try to learn how the German says that which the Hebrew expresses.”
- Advocates of “literal” translations like John Piper seem to claim that they can do a better

## A) Evaluation of the “Literal” Approach to Bible Translation: *NASB & ESV*

The greatest strength of the more literal approach to Bible translation is that one can get a feel for the actual Hebrew or Greek text. An English word generally corresponds to one Greek word. But if this is desired then it would be even better to use a Greek or Hebrew text, or at least a transliterated text which gives the ancient text with the literal English.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, we do not even accept the common notion that a more “literal” translation is the best “study Bible.” The best way to study the Bible is to have several translations, the Hebrew and Greek texts, and good commentaries that provide any significant data on the original text. Relatively speaking then, a “literal” translation is not a better “study Bible” than a “dynamic” translation.

In fact, if you can have only one Bible, we would argue that a fuller translation such as the NIV or NLT would be a better study Bible than the more “wooden” NASB or ESV.<sup>17</sup> Along these lines, Drs. Fee and Strauss have written:

Functional equivalent versions are also helpful for detailed study, and especially as a complement to Hebrew and Greek study. This is because while literal versions tend to simply reproduce Hebrew and Greek grammatical forms, functional equivalent versions go further and clarify the “functional” relationships between phrases and clauses. In this way they answer the syntactical and exegetical questions advanced students are asking about the text.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> An excellent and free interlinear Hebrew and Greek Bible can be downloaded or used online at <http://www.scripture4all.org/>. A printed example of a transliterated Greek text is the *Interlinear NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English* (Zondervan, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, we would disagree with the distinctions made by Michael Marlowe: “For close study the ESV is less suitable than the NASB or NKJV. These latter versions, despite their difficulties and obscurities, continue to be the most useful for detailed and careful study.” (<http://www.bible-researcher.com/esv.html>). No doubt, advocates of the ESV would disagree as well, but for other reasons.

<sup>18</sup> Fee, Gordon D.; Strauss, Mark L., *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions* (Zondervan, 2007).

Nevertheless, the goal of following the mere *form* of the ancient text is the only advantage over dynamic translations that we can think of, and the only real one that its proponents claim. This is not much of an advantage when reflecting the mere form of the base text frequently does not help to accurately convey the meaning in the receptor language. In fact, "literal" translations often obscure the meaning. Accordingly, the weaknesses of a more "literal" approach to Bible translation would seem to far outweigh the advantages.<sup>19</sup>

Accordingly, Dr. Strauss writes:

In general, formal equivalence ["literal" approach] gives greater prominence to the source language [ancient texts], particularly its formal structure; functional equivalence [dynamic approach] gives *equal* prominence to source and receptor languages, stressing that both the meaning of the original and the perception of the readers are essential components of translation.

. . .

[T]here are fundamental flaws with formal equivalence as a philosophy of translation. This is because *meaning* not *form* [i.e. sentence structure] is the goal of Bible translation.

The assumption of many practitioners seems to be that . . . if you attain formal equivalence [i.e. in sentence structure] you have reached semantic [meaning] equivalence. But . . . this is far from the case, since the formal structures of Hebrew and Greek are very different than the formal structures of English (or any other language). Even versions which claim to be "essentially literal" are far from formally equivalent. They constantly fall back on idiomatic renderings whenever formal equivalence does not work. In other words function or meaning is given precedence over form.

This is because translators intuitively recognize that in almost every sentence, Greek and Hebrew idioms do not "work" the way English works. Thus, while translators of literal versions may be proceeding with a method of formal equivalence (word for word replacement), their decisions are governed by a philosophy of functional equivalence (change the form whenever necessary to retain the meaning).

The problem comes when translation decisions are affected by the perceived need to retain form. The result is often barely-comprehensible (or incomprehensible) English rather than

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<sup>19</sup> Not even the more "literal" translations will reflect the passive or aorist tenses of Greek verbs, or wordplays in the original languages. This is where good commentaries can allow us to see these things in the original languages.

a natural rendering which communicates to contemporary readers with the same clarity that the Greek or Hebrew communicated to the original readers.<sup>20</sup>

Drs. Gordon Fee and Mark Strauss give some simple examples of what real “literal” translations would look like:

The Greek text of Matthew 1:18, translated literally, says that before her marriage to Joseph, Mary was discovered to be “having in belly” (*en gastri echousa*). This Greek idiom means she was “pregnant.” Translating literally would make a text that was clear and natural to its original readers into one that is strange and obscure to English ears.

Psalm 12:2, translated literally from the Hebrew, says that wicked people speak “with a heart and a heart” (or, as some “literal” versions render it, “with a double heart”). This Hebrew idiom means “deceitfully.” Translating literally obscures the meaning for most readers. The form must be changed in order to reproduce the meaning.<sup>21</sup>

We’re going to primarily use the ESV to illustrate the weaknesses of formal (“literal”) translation because it is being so highly touted by men we greatly respect, as the best Bible translation available. Our critiques below will also usually apply to the KJV, NKJV, NASB, RSV, and HCSB translations as well.

An example of needlessly sticking to the *wording* of the base text and obscuring the translation is seen in the common translation of Matthew 23:5, speaking of the Pharisees: “**They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries [phylactēria] broad and their fringes long**” (ESV, cf. NIV, NASB, RSV). Obviously, the translators translated the Greek word rather literally, but how many 21<sup>st</sup> century English speakers know what a “**phylactery**” is? We know from 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish cultural studies that this was the word used to refer to the little boxes containing Scripture verses that were attached to the arm and were prescribed in OT Law (cf. Exod 13:1-10, 11-16; Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-12). Accordingly, a reader of Matthew’s Gospel in the first century would have been familiar with this term. They had seen “**phylacteries**”

<sup>20</sup> Mark L. Strauss, “Form, Function, and the “Literal Meaning” Fallacy in Bible Translation,” 4-5; online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/Strauss.LiteralFallacy.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon Fee and Mark L. Strauss, “It’s All Greek to Me: Translating God’s Word Into Today’s Language,” 7; online at <http://www.biblicadirect.com/p-960-its-all-greek-to-me-leaflet.aspx>.

being worn by orthodox Jews all over the Roman Empire. But how many American Christians have ever seen a “**phylactery**” today, or even know what it is?

Therefore, if the goal of a good Bible translation for 21<sup>st</sup> century English-speaking Christians is that it is in *their language* and understandable, then a literal “word-for-word” translation of *phylactēria* is a mistake. Accordingly, the NLT is a better translation of Matthew 23:5: “**Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside.**” That is a good translation of Matthew’s Gospel because, as a dynamic translation, it immediately makes the Apostle more clear and understandable than any “literal” translation (cf. CEV, NCV).

An example of needlessly sticking to the *syntactical form* of the base text and therefore actually obscuring its original meaning is Luke 7:47 in the ESV: “**Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for [because] she loved much.**” And the more “literal” NASB, KJV and NKJV do the same. While this rendering follows the syntactical structure of the Greek text closely, it implies that the woman’s sins were “**forgiven**” *because* “**she loved much.**” Obviously this is not the case, as this would be salvation by works. In fact, Christ’s parable is teaching the exact opposite- we love because we’ve been forgiven. Accordingly, the NLT reads: “**I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love.**” Likewise, the updated NIV corrects earlier versions here and reads: “**Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown.**” The NLT and NIV not only use better English in Luke 7:47, but even more accurately reflect the Greek text and what Jesus meant.<sup>22</sup>

Examples of needlessly sticking to the syntactical form of the base text and, therefore, producing awkward Biblish instead of modern English abound in “literal” translations. One of many examples is the ESV translation of Acts 8:23: “**For I see that you are in the gall of**

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<sup>22</sup> Darrell Bock, a widely recognized expert on the Greek text of the Gospel of Luke writes concerning Luke 7:47:

The parable explains why the woman acted, and her actions testify to the presence of forgiveness, which produced love. Because the woman was forgiven much, she loves much; her love is demonstrated by her actions, so that her great love reflects the presence of great forgiveness. The forgiveness is not a result of the acts; rather, the acts testify to love’s presence in gratitude for the previous granting of forgiveness. The causal *oti* clause relates love and forgiveness and makes love the evidence of forgiveness. In fact, the reference to forgiveness in the perfect [completed] sense (*apheōntai*) stresses that she is in a state of forgiveness. Darrell Bock, *Luke (BECNT)* (Baker, 1994), 703.

**bitterness and in the bond of iniquity**" (cf. KJV, NASB, NRSV). Again, if modern English useage is an attribute of a good Bible translation for 21<sup>st</sup> century American Christians and churches, then this is not a good translation. When is the last time you heard someone say, "**gall of bitterness**"? How many people even know what "**gall**" is? And for that matter, who would tell someone they are "**in the bond of iniquity,**" and if they did, would the other person understand them?

"**The gall** [*chole*] **of bitterness** [*pikria*]" was a Hebrew idiom (saying) referring to the acidic juices or bile produced by the liver for digestion (cf. Job 16:13). Accordingly, to say that a person was experiencing "**gall**" rather literally meant they were experiencing the bitter taste of acid reflux! Metaphorically, it meant "that is a bitter pill to swallow" or a "bitter, hard experience of life,"<sup>23</sup> or "excessive bitterness."<sup>24</sup> In other words, while "**the gall of bitterness**" was a well understood saying in the Apostle Peter's day who spoke it, it is a dead idiom in 21<sup>st</sup> century English and should not be used. This is not English for us, but Blish.

Imagine a Chinese Christian reading a supposed Chinese Bible translation that imposes on him contemporary American idioms and sayings that he is not familiar with and are not used in his culture? It would be a bad and even rather insensitive and perhaps even offensive translation. Thankfully, then, what the ESV translates as "**For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity,**" the NIV renders the Greek simply, clearly, elegantly, and *accurately*: "**For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.**" That is a good translation. The NLT is essentially the same: "**For I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin.**" Elsewhere, Dr. Strauss shares several more examples of substandard English particularly in the ESV.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Leland Ryken, James Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds. (Intervarsity, 1998), 315.

<sup>24</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, Acts 8:23; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>25</sup> Regarding several more examples of substandard English particularly in the ESV see For many examples of substandard English in the ESV see Mark Strauss, "Why the English Standard Version (ESV) Should Not Become the Standard English Version," Available online at: <http://zondervan.typepad.com/files/improvingesv2.pdf>.

## B) Evaluating Bible Paraphrases: *The Message*

On the other hand, paraphrases often depart from the original text too far, and also end up obscuring the meaning. A good example is the Message Bible, authored by Eugene Petersen. It has sold into the multi-millions, currently the eighth most popular Bible translation just behind the NASB as noted above. Mr. Peterson has received a Gold Medallion Award and an ECPA Christian Book Award for the Message Bible. And if he didn't call it a "Bible" we would be happy to promote it as provocative devotional reading. Unfortunately, however, "the publisher has advertised it as a "translation from the original languages" that "accurately communicates the original Hebrew and Greek" and brings out "the subtleties and nuances of the Hebrew and Greek languages."<sup>26</sup> In many instances throughout the Message, this would not seem to be true.

For example, Mr. Peterson writes Matthew 23:5 as follows: "Their lives are perpetual fashion shows, embroidered prayer shawls one day and flowery prayers the next." "Flowery prayers" is not anywhere near Matthew's original intent in using the Greek *phlachtērion*, nor what Jesus was referring to. While "literal" translators obscure the text for 21<sup>st</sup> century American readers by using "**phylacteries**," the *author* of the Message Bible obscures the original intent by "translating" the Greek as "flowery prayers." Therefore, we do not put these phrases from the Message Bible in bold as we do for Scripture quotations because this is not Scripture.

Unfortunately, in light of Mr. Peterson's claim to be accurately translating Scripture, there are many such examples. In John 3:5 the NIV has Jesus accurately saying: "**Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.**" Even the supposedly more "dynamic" NLT is virtually the same. However, Mr. Peterson relates Jesus' saying this way:

Unless a person submits to this original creation—the 'wind-hovering-over-the-water' creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it's not possible to enter God's kingdom.

For all of his effort to make the Bible understandable, Mr. Peterson obscures the original meaning in several ways. First, and most obvious, the statement doesn't make any sense. What would it mean if "a person submits to this original creation"? Secondly, there is no

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted by Michael Marlowe online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/themessage.html>.

mention of the Holy Spirit which is a very integral part of what Christ was saying and the biblical basis for Evangelicals to speak of "being born again by the Spirit." Thirdly, Mr. Peterson evidently interprets Jesus as alluding to either the "original creation" of Genesis 1, and/or water "baptism." We have argued elsewhere that the birth from water mentioned here refers to our physical birth into physical life and the birth of the Spirit as our spiritual birth into spiritual life.<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, it would be better to refer to those who produce paraphrases as *authors* rather than translators. And such works should be read as biblical *sermons*, rather than Scripture itself. Interestingly, one critic of Mr. Peterson says:

His method is comparable to that of a preacher in the pulpit . . . The version incorporates a number of interesting but peculiar interpretations that can only be described as homiletic. . . . Peterson's homiletic method of handling of the text should have been more clearly explained in the introduction, and in the advertising of the version. "<sup>28</sup>

Eugene Peterson, the author of the Message has said himself:

When I'm in a congregation where somebody uses [*The Message*] in the Scripture reading, it makes me a little uneasy. I would never recommend it be used as saying, "Hear the Word of God from *The Message*."<sup>29</sup>

If the Message is understood and promoted as a very good and provocative reflection of one man on "the message" of the Bible, then it certainly has its place. A critic has said:

This book should be recognized for what it is. It began as a stimulating paraphrase of the Epistle to the Galatians included in a popular devotional book, and it remains a piece of stimulating devotional literature. But it is not the Word of God. As Craig Blomberg of Denver Seminary has put it, "it is freer even than a paraphrase. I think of it more as devotional literature than as a

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<sup>27</sup> Regarding our interpretation of John 3:5 see "Water Baptism" in the Theological Papers section of TrainingTimothy.org.

<sup>28</sup> Marlowe.

<sup>29</sup> Eugene Peterson, quoted by Doug Leblanc in "'I Didn't Want to Be Cute', in *Christianity Today* (Oct 2002); available online at: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/october7/33.107.html?start=2>.

version of the Bible and wouldn't recommend it for any other role." <sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, when it is perceived by many as an accurate translation of God's word, it is a serious and potentially spiritually damaging mistake. We do not believe Mr. Peterson in any way intended this, nor are we critical of him personally as some are, but we wonder if the publisher, Nav Press, should take some responsibility for both claiming and promoting the deceptive idea that the Message deserves the high title of a Bible. <sup>31</sup>

### C) The Superiority of Dynamic "Thought for Thought" Bible Translations: *NIV & NLT*

Even a little thought and a basic understanding of linguistics will rather immediately convince a person that good translation *must* be "thought for thought." In my own visits to minister in Cameroon West Africa, Honduras, and Mexico, one thing that becomes immediately evident is that often in modern languages there is no equivalent for an English word. Accordingly, a "literal" or "word for word" approach is insufficient. <sup>32</sup> As noted above, even the NIV goes awry when they try to be too "literal" in their use of "**phylacteries**" in Matthew 23:5.

If this incongruence exists with modern languages which have some relationship (e.g. Spanish, French, English), imagine the disparity between languages that originate in different millenniums and

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<sup>30</sup> Marlowe.

<sup>31</sup> For a description of the advertising campaign for the Message see Marlowe.

<sup>32</sup> Eugene Nida is especially known as the "father of dynamic translation." He was the Executive Secretary of the Translations Department of the American Bible Society for more than thirty years (1946-1980). Nida's principal books are *Message and Mission: The Communication of the Christian Faith* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960); *Toward a Science of Translating, with Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964); *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1969); and see also the book he later co-authored with Jan de Waard, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986). For biographical information see Eugene A. Nida, *Fascinated by Languages* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2003). For a complete bibliography of Nida's writings and a discussion of his influence see Philip C. Stine, *Let the Words Be Written: The Lasting Influence of Eugene A. Nida* (American Bible Society, 2004).

continents. Accordingly, David Dewey in his good book, *A User's Guide to Bible Translations*, remarks:

[T]he Bible is anything but English, and [its original text] comes from a distant past and a remote culture. The challenges facing the translator cannot be overestimated.<sup>33</sup>

The chronological and cultural gaps are significant between Hebrew, Greek, and English. Hebrew originated some 6000 years ago in modern day Iraq and Iran. Our first examples of biblical Hebrew outside of Scripture occur c. 1200 B. C.<sup>34</sup> In addition, "Hebrew, [was] for a long time a dead language apart from its religious use within Jewish synagogues . . . Very little ancient Hebrew—only a few inscriptions—is found outside the Bible."<sup>35</sup>

Early Greek cultures are as ancient as Semitic ones. However, while the classic "Attic" Greek that Homer (c. 850 B. C.) wrote with is millennia old, the NT is written in *koinē* ("common"), the language of the Greek Empire beginning in about 300 B. C., which was centered in southern Europe.

Regarding English, we read:

Historically, English originated from the fusion of languages and dialects, now collectively termed Old English, which were brought

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<sup>33</sup> David Dewey, *A User's Guide to Bible Translations: Making the Most of Different Versions* (Intervarsity, 2005), 30

<sup>34</sup> L. McFall in the *ISBE* writes concerning the Hebrew language:

Relatively few words in the OT do not have their counterpart in some other Semitic language. . . . The languages spoken in the Middle East during the historical period dealt with in the Bible have been called Semitic, after Shem the son of Noah from whom the majority of peoples speaking these languages—Arabs, Hebrews, Arameans, and Assyrians (Gen 10:21-31)—were descended. The biblical record and Jewish tradition imply that Hebrew was the original language of mankind. ("Hebrew Language" in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, George Bromiley ed. (Eerdmans, 1988), II:657-661.

Accordingly, we have examples from about 2500 B. C. However, the Hebrew language as we have it in our earliest OT manuscripts dates from around 1200 B. C. In addition, spoken Hebrew became essentially extinct from the Babylonian Captivity (c. 450 B. C.) onward. Accordingly, "it is very likely that Aramaic replaced Hebrew as the spoken language by the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. B. C., and "whether Hebrew was spoken in NT times is still debated." *Ibid.*, 660.

<sup>35</sup> Dewey, 30.

to the eastern coast of Great Britain by Germanic (Anglo-Saxon) settlers by the 5th century.<sup>36</sup>

Accordingly, these languages originate from three very different cultures and times: ancient Mesopotamia, 300 B. C. southern Europe, and 400 A. D. Germany. It should not surprise us then that they are very different languages themselves. For example, Hebrew could hardly be more different than English. Up until about 1000 B. C. Hebrew had no vowels, and nearly all of its words derive from a combination of three consonants. And it really doesn't have adjectives, as nouns are used in descriptive ways. "The Hebrew verbal system is . . . so complicated at the level of semantics [meaning] that tomes are written on the subject, espousing theories that differ one from another."<sup>37</sup> Remarking on the characteristics of Hebrew compared to English Mr. Dewey remarks:

A Hebrew sentence, especially in poetry, may consist of only two or three words, but eight or nine English words may be necessary in translation. . . . Many sentences have no verb at all; one has to be supplied to the sentence to make sense in English.<sup>38</sup>

Likewise, NT scholar Douglas Moo has said, "The passage of 2000 years has turned ancient Greek and Hebrew from living languages into historical artifacts."<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, pursuing a translation theory that prioritizes conforming to the literal wording and sentence structure of such languages is misguided. Dynamic translations are simply better able to bring out the full intended meaning of the original authors of Scripture. Along these lines, one of the NIV translators, OT scholar Ronald Youngblood, has written:

To render the Greek word *sarx* by "flesh" virtually every time it appears does not require the services of a translator . . . . But to recognize that *sarx* has differing connotations in different contexts, that in addition to "flesh" it often means "human standards" or "earthly descent" or "sinful nature" or "sexual

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<sup>36</sup> "English language," online at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English\\_language#cite\\_ref-28](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language#cite_ref-28).

<sup>37</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Baker, 1998), 50.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Douglas Moo online at: <http://www.niv-cbt.org/niv-2011-overview/video-featuring-dr-moo/>

impulse" or "person," etc., and therefore to translate *sarx* in a variety of ways, is to understand that translation is not only a mechanical, word-for-word process but also a nuanced thought-for-thought procedure.<sup>40</sup>

Likewise, Dr. Strauss writes:

How much of the culture should translators communicate in the translation itself and how much should they leave for commentaries and teachers to explain? Literalist translators sometimes retreat into the axiom, "only say what the original text says; don't interpret what it means." But this is problematic, since the text "said" many things to the original readers which the modern reader cannot infer through a simple replacement of words.

Take a passage like Matthew 9:10, where Jesus calls Matthew and then attends a banquet at his home. Compare the following translations.

Closest formal equivalent: "as he was reclining in the house..."

NASB: "as He was reclining at the table [not in original] in the house..."

ESV: "as Jesus reclined at table in the house..."

TEV: "While Jesus was having a meal in Matthew's house..."

NIV: "While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house..."

NLT: "That night Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to be his dinner guests."

Which translation is most accurate? The closest formal ["literal"] equivalent, "reclining in the house," leaves out much of the meaning. It does not explain that Jesus was reclining on a cushion around a low table or that this posture indicated a formal banquet. Nor does it express the nature of first-century meals as rituals of social status.

Some would argue that these ideas are better left to a commentary, but in fact they are all critical parts of the original meaning which the author intended and which a first century reader would have immediately recognized. None of them would be evident to a modern English reader. Because of the cultural and social differences, a literal translation leaves out much of the content which the original communicated. . . .

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<sup>40</sup> Ronald Youngblood, quoted in Kenneth L. Barker, *Accuracy Defined and Illustrated: An NIV Translator Answers your Questions* (International Bible Society, 1995), 54. See also the brief explanation by Herbert M. Wolf, "When 'Literal' Is Not Accurate," in *The NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation*, edited by Kenneth L. Barker (International Bible Society, 1991), 130.

Formal equivalent ["literal"] translations may choose to withhold much of the meaning by staying with the structure of the Greek. This does not make them more accurate or precise, nor closer to the meaning of the Greek. It just makes them a different kind of version which allows the reader to better see the formal [structural] characteristics of the Greek sentence. The implications and connotations which these versions withhold were part of the meaning of the utterance intended by the original author and understood by the original readers. . . .

Some Bible versions seem to consider it a virtue to provide as little syntactical interpretation as possible, leaving readers to wrestle with the differences between Greek and English grammar. But who is better able to deal with the idiosyncrasies of Greek grammar, translators with years of experience reading and interpreting Koine Greek, or an English reader who has never even seen a Greek sentence? <sup>41</sup>

Elsewhere, Dr. Strauss has written:

There is an unfortunate tendency among biblical scholars—who live in the world of Hebrew and Greek—to think they are getting it "right" if they mimic the form of the original languages. The unfortunate result is a tendency to create "half-idioms" (half-English/half-Greek), transferring a few words of the original, but missing its meaning in standard English. This is what the ESV does when people speak "with a double heart" (Ps. 12:2), have "news in their mouths" (2 Sam. 18:25), "go in and out among them" (Acts 1:21; 9:28), or "fill up the measure of their fathers" (Matt. 23:32). These are half-idioms—Biblish rather than English. <sup>42</sup>

Martin Luther (1483-1546) said the same thing when describing his own translation philosophy for the world-changing German Bible he produced:

I must let the literal words go and try to learn how the German says that which the Hebrew expresses . . . Whoever would speak German must not use Hebrew style. Rather he must see to it—once he understands the Hebrew author—that he concentrates on the sense of the text, asking himself, "Pray tell, what do the Germans say in such a situation?" . . . Let him drop the Hebrew

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<sup>41</sup> Strauss, "Form", 7, 17.

<sup>42</sup> Strauss, "ESV".

words and express the meaning freely in the best German he knows.<sup>43</sup>

As Dr. Carson remarks:

[O]ne cannot responsibly translate a text under some rigid dictum that the same word in the receptor language must always render a word in the donor text. This has been understood for centuries. . . . [I]f one opts for the axiom “as formal [“literal”] as possible,” one frequently ends up with a translation that actually distorts much of the meaning of the donor text.<sup>44</sup>

Accordingly, in the preface to the 1611 edition of the King James Version, the translators write: “We have not tied ourselves to a uniformity of phrasing [to the original languages] or to an identity of words as some peradventure would wish that we had done.”<sup>45</sup> Evidently, even the rather “literal” KJV translators had their critics. Unfortunately, in our opinion, the same unfounded criticisms of dynamic “thought for thought” translations exist today.

Most conservative, Evangelical, Bible scholars recommend a “dynamic” thought-for-thought philosophy when it comes to translating Scripture. For example, Grant Osborne, Professor of NT at Trinity has written the following in favor of the “dynamic” approach to Bible translation:

The true question is whether formal [“literal”] equivalence or functional [“dynamic”] equivalence, as Bible translation theories, produces the best translation for our day. . . . According to [the dynamic, functional, “thought for thought”] approach, it is not the *original terms* but the *meaning of the whole* that is important, asking the question, “How would Isaiah or Paul say this *today* to get his meaning across?” (the Good News Bible and NLT are examples; NIV and NRSV are sometimes literal, sometimes dynamic).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works* (Muhlenberg, 1960), 35:193.

<sup>44</sup> Carson, 63, 70.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted by Carson, 63.

<sup>46</sup> Grant Osborne, “Do Inclusive-Language Bibles Distort Scripture?” *Christianity Today*, October 27, 1997.

Likewise, some of the most respected Bible scholars have written endorsements for the book written by Gordon Fee and Mark Strauss in support of dynamic translation. D. A. Carson writes of this book:

Yet another book on translation? Yes, and this is the one I shall now recommend to concerned Christians who want to understand what the perpetual flap over Bible translation is all about. Few will agree with every judgment in its pages, but for courtesy to all sides, accuracy in technical matters, clarity of writing, a deep commitment to faithful rendering of the original, and an abundant supply of that least common gift, “common sense,” this is the book on translation that deserves widest circulation.<sup>47</sup>

Another NT scholar, Ben Witherington III writes:

This is the perfect little book to help the student of the Bible understand why different translations of the same verses look so different, and how to decide which Bible translation is right for the student in question.<sup>48</sup>

Darrell Bock, Professor of NT at Dallas Theological Seminary writes:

Finally, a book that translates for the average person what is good about translations and how they work! You can’t tell how good players are without a scorecard. So here is a very helpful scorecard on what to look for in Bibles and why. In sum, well done, much needed, thanks.<sup>49</sup>

OT scholar Walt Kaiser writes of the book:

Gordon Fee has teamed up with Mark Strauss to produce another winner — How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions. . . . Readers will be more accurately informed on how translation decisions are made and which translations are best suited for which audiences. . . . Fee and Strauss have upheld both accuracy and meaning.<sup>50</sup>

Daniel Block, Professor of OT at Wheaton writes:

Lay people often imagine that Bible translation is simply a matter of replacing one word in the original language with one word in

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<sup>47</sup> Fee and Strauss.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

the target language. Those involved in such work know that the matter is much more complex and that translation always involves interpretation. . . . Fee and Strauss have . . . provided pastors and teachers who seek to guide their people through the translation maze with one of the finest resources available.<sup>51</sup>

Bruce Waltke, Professor of OT, Reformed Theological Seminary

This book, a must-read for pastors and Christians who love and read the Bible, is sensible (i.e., explains the why, what, and how of translation), sober (i.e., shows the strengths and weaknesses of all the major English versions), simple (i.e., in language a seventh grader can understand, and salted with illustrations), and spiritual (i.e., fills one with praise to God for the work of all translators and stops the unjust demonization of any translation).

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

## **D) Errors, Exaggerations, & Even Slander by Critics of Dynamic Translations: Piper, Packer, & MacArthur**

Dr. Walke is right to point out the modern “unjust demonization” of particularly dynamic translations of Scripture. And this is unfortunately happening through some of the most respected Bible Teachers in our land.

### **D.1) The errors of John Piper**

All of the above is why we disagree with the rightly respected Pastor John Piper. His recent promotion of the ESV and attack on the NIV are rather well known.<sup>53</sup> In an article entitled: “What does John Piper think about the NIV?” he writes:

My aim . . . is to help you be persuaded that exposing millions of people (pastors, teachers, students, laypeople) to the ESV would undo the dominance of the NIV and put in its place a more literal, and yet a beautifully readable, memorable Bible—the English Standard Version. And this would be a good thing. . . . [T]here are four convictions at stake.

1. A more literal translation respects the original author's way of writing. It is a way of honoring the inspired writers.
2. Translators are fallible and they may mislead the English reader if they use unnecessary paraphrases to bring out one possible meaning and conceal others.
3. A more literal translation gives preachers more confidence that they can preach what the English text says with authority and that it reflects what the original Greek or Hebrew text says.
4. A more literal translation which preserves ambiguities that are really there in the original keeps open the possibility of new insight by future Bible readers.<sup>54</sup>

Dr. Piper's opinions warrant several responses. First, his claim that the ESV represents “beautifully readable” English would seem odd to

<sup>53</sup> See for example, John Piper, “Good English With Minimal Translation: Why Bethlehem Uses the ESV”, online at <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/good-english-with-minimal-translation-why-bethlehem-uses-the-esv>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

most and will be proven to be at best an exaggeration, if not plain error throughout this book.

Secondly, the priority of Bible translation is *not* to “respect the original author’s way of writing” as Dr. Piper contends, but rather, to respect and reflect their *meaning*. We have demonstrated above with only a few of many possible examples that being confined to the mere *form* of an ancient language will often actually result in at least bad English, if not an actually deceptive translation.<sup>55</sup> If we truly want to be “honoring the inspired writers,” we will translate their writings as accurately, fully, and clearly in modern English as we can, which will *not* mean using a formal equivalency approach as Dr. Piper contends.

Thirdly, we have already addressed the claim that, “A more literal translation gives preachers more confidence that . . . the English text . . . reflects what the original Greek or Hebrew text says.” On the contrary, if a preacher really feels the need to seriously question the English translation of the NIV or NLT, or wants to have more access to the Greek text--then use the Greek text! Why promote the idea that the best English Bible translation for Christians in general is essentially a Hebrew and Greek language tool [e.g. NASB, ESV], and not even the best one at that?

Fourth, we confess to not really understand what Dr. Piper means by the idea that “A more literal translation which preserves ambiguities” somehow facilitates “the possibility of new insight by future Bible readers.” The meaning of Scripture does not change, and if one uses multiple translations and good commentaries they will be best assured of grasping that never changing meaning of the biblical authors.

Finally, we would comment on Dr. Piper’s second “conviction” of why the ESV is so superior to the NIV: “Translators are fallible and they may mislead the English reader if they use unnecessary paraphrases to bring out one possible meaning and conceal others.” Likewise, he writes:

In a nutshell, my view of the English language Bible translation enterprise is that the goal should be to preserve the ambiguities [which can be more like obscurities] in good English [which the ESV is not] that are present in the original language. Paraphrasing [as if the NIV is one?] these ambiguities in English

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<sup>55</sup> For dozens of other examples of how the ESV’s adherence to formal equivalency translation obscures the English translation see Strauss, “ESV”.

to "clarify" them is the role of the preacher and commentator, not the role of the translator.<sup>56</sup>

We disagree. In fact, while he doesn't intend to, what Dr. Piper is advocating seems to put us back to the Middle Ages when the Roman Catholic Church insisted that the Scriptures be left in obscure Latin so that only the "experts" could "clarify" what God really said. He surely hasn't abandoned the historical, orthodox position on the "perspicuity [clarity] of Scripture."<sup>57</sup> He certainly wouldn't fault **"the [Greek] Bereans [who] were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they . . . examined the [Greek Septuagint version of the Hebrew] Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true"** (Acts 17:11), probably without any preachers or commentators helping them.

Accordingly, the **"Bereans"** were completely dependent on the LXX translators to accurately and as fully as possible communicate what the original texts said. And so are any Christians who have not literally spent decades studying extinct, complicated, incredibly unique languages like Hebrew and Greek. Suggesting that we should leave "ambiguities" in Bible translations targeted to the general Christian public is wrong-headed. On the contrary, the role of a translator *is* to "clarify" as many "ambiguities" as possible- that is what effective translation is.

Of course the difficulty here is that there are legitimate, optional translations/interpretations of many biblical texts. On words and phrases easy to translate even "word for word," there is no debate, and even more dynamic translations use a single word. But there are places in the Hebrew and Greek text where the meaning of the word or phrase is unclear. Then there is a choice: translate it "literally," leaving it more unclear, or choose a particular translation/interpretation in order to make it clearer. And what good dynamic translations like the NIV and NLT do is provide many footnotes noting the significant and legitimate options in translation that Dr. Piper is so concerned with communicating.

I understand Dr. Piper's concern that a whole, united, translation *team* of people who have devoted much of their lives to studying ancient biblical languages and have more experience than anyone else on the planet for understanding them and translating them into

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<sup>56</sup> John Piper, "What Does John Piper Think About the TNIV?," online at: <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/what-does-john-piper-think-about-the-tniv>.

<sup>57</sup> Regarding the "perspicuity [clarity] of Scripture" see section 3.3.A.3.

English, and have as great a fear as anyone of dishonoring their Savior and misleading His people by making the wrong translation, might still choose the wrong translation. But why is Dr. Piper so confident that he can consistently do better than those who have translated the NIV, NLT, and other translations that he is so critical of?

As we note elsewhere, the translation committees of these versions reads like a “who’s who” of this generation’s very best Hebrew and Greek scholars in the world.<sup>58</sup> I’d place my bet on *teams* of ancient language scholars like that, who often spend *days* discussing a single verse, rather than one intelligent and gifted preacher who might have one hour to do the same in sermon preparation, like Dr. Piper.

## D.2) The exaggeration of J. I. Packer

We feel there is a good deal of inaccurate and even irresponsible statements being made by influential people in this area of Bible translation. To understand better what we mean, Dr. Strauss alludes to this when he writes:

Translations which claim to be literal are in fact often quite dynamic. Take for example the ESV, a recent revision of the RSV, which claims in its Preface to be an “essentially literal translation.”<sup>59</sup>

Dr. Strauss goes on to demonstrate that, in fact, there are many places where the ESV practices a very dynamic approach to translation. For example, commenting on Hebrews 1:1 he writes:

Lexically, of course, the ESV has changed all of the words, seeking English lexemes which approximate the meaning of the Greek. Grammatically, the ESV has radically altered the verse, rearranging the word order and changing five of the seven main grammatical forms.

None of this is meant to be critical of the ESV. All of it was necessary. The point is that every word and phrase was first interpreted and then modified and restructured to express the same meaning in English. An “essentially literal” translation – either lexically or syntactically – is a myth.

It is ultimately irrelevant whether an adverb is replaced by a prepositional phrase or a participle replaced by a verb. The

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<sup>58</sup> For the list of translators for the NIV see section 15.4.B.1. For the NLT see section 15.4.C.

<sup>59</sup> Strauss, “Form,” 16-17.

question that matters is, “Is the meaning reproduced?” As a method, translators may choose to follow the grammatical forms inasmuch as possible. This often works. But in every case, formal syntactical correspondence must be subordinated to functional correspondence

In light of the significant differences between form and meaning, the ESV sounds oddly contradictory when it claims that “As an essentially literal translation . . . the ESV seeks to carry over every possible nuance of meaning in the original words of Scripture into our own language.” We might cynically ask, which are they trying to do, produce an “essentially literal translation” or “carry over every possible nuance of meaning”? Thousands of examples could be marshaled to show that these two goals – which the ESV treats as one and the same – are in almost constant tension.<sup>60</sup>

Elsewhere, Dr. Strauss illustrates this further:

One anecdote may be helpful here. As I was reading through the ESV (in conjunction with another project), I came to the epistle to the Hebrews. Hebrews contains some of the finest literary Greek in the New Testament and can be a very difficult book for my Greek students. I expected to encounter substantial problems in the ESV. Instead, I found that the ESV was quite well translated in Hebrews, with fewer of the kinds of problems I was encountering elsewhere.

Then the reason dawned on me. The fine literary Greek of Hebrews—with radically different word order, grammar and idiom—is simply impossible to translate literally into English. To do so produces gibberish. Ironically, the ESV was at its best when it abandoned its “essentially literal” strategy and translated the meaning of the text into normal English.<sup>61</sup>

With such a background, let’s examine what J. I. Packer has said about Bible translations and seems to exaggerate the superiority of the “literal” approach:

Formal equivalency [“literal”] versions are not, of course, word-for-word in any mechanical sense; they seek simply to catch all the meaning that the text expresses, book by book, section by section, paragraph by paragraph, and sentence by sentence, in a way that the original writer, were he with us today,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Strauss, “ESV.”

would recognize as a full and exact rendering of what he sought to put across to his own readership, now expressed in clusters of English words that as far as possible match those that he used himself.<sup>62</sup>

Really? Isn't that what all conscientious Bible translation teams are trying to do? Is it only the more "literal" translation approach that Dr. Piper is advocating that accomplishes this best? We don't think so. And contrary to Dr. Packer's exaggeration, "literal" translation *does not* "seek simply to catch all the meaning that the text expresses," but intentionally often leaves things obscure.

Secondly, Dr. Packer apparently and irresponsibly lumps all "dynamic" translations with paraphrases and writes:

The second category [of Bible translations] is usually labeled "thought-for-thought" or "dynamic equivalent" renderings. Here the translators' avowed aim is to induce, directly and immediately, the same positive complex of compelling interest and intellectual, emotional, and volitional response that the original writers sought to trigger in their own readership [no it's not- they desire accuracy], and the developed method is to modify the wording and imagery of the text as a means to this end. Lively English covering the semantic field of the original in a consistently colloquial way, bringing out its implications without being bound by its sentence structure, is the goal.

Examples are the Good News Bible, the Living Bible and the New Living Translation (the latter a skillful, scholarly recasting of the former), the Contemporary English Version, the New Century Bible, and God's Word. All are beamed first and foremost on adolescents and young adults who, so it is hoped, may be newly drawn into Bible reading by the brisk, vivid, even chummy way that everything is expressed. . . . [T]he change is only for warmth and chattiness. . . . [the] focus [meaning?] is blurred.<sup>63</sup>

At best, such slurs may apply to one-man paraphrases, but to lump the New Living *Translation* into this group is, again, inaccurate and irresponsible. At least he calls it "scholarly," but those scholars would strongly disagree with how Dr. Packer has described their purpose for the NLT. Evidence of Dr. Packer's error can be found in how similar the NIV and NLT read in many verses of Scripture.

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<sup>62</sup> J. I. Packer in foreword to Wayne Grudem and J. I. Packer, *Translating Truth: The Case for Essentially Literal Bible Translation* (Crossway, 2005).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

One more exaggeration. Dr. Packer writes of the “dynamic” translations:

Where the exact meaning of the text is elusive and more than one understanding is possible, this method requires a smooth rendering of the translators’ views that will leave readers unaware that any difficulty and range of options exists at all. <sup>64</sup>

Nonsense. As already noted, the NLT includes copious notes informing the reader of optional translations.

### **D.3) The slander by John MacArthur**

John MacArthur writes in an article entitled “Which Bible translation is best?”: <sup>65</sup>

Since no one language corresponds perfectly to any other language, every translation involves some degree of interpretation. A translation based on formal [“literal”] equivalency has a low degree of interpretation; translators are trying to convey the meaning of each particular word. When faced with a choice between readability and accuracy, formal equivalency translators are willing to sacrifice readability for the sake of accuracy.

Let’s stop there. Essentially, Dr. MacArthur is claiming that those who approach translation from a more “thought for thought” perspective are sacrificing accuracy for readability. That statement is not only untrue but irresponsible. Dynamic translators would say they are sacrificing the exact wording and structure of the original language in order to actually translate it *more* accurately into the language we speak.

Dr. MacArthur goes on:

By its very nature, a translation based on dynamic equivalency requires a high degree of interpretation. The goal of dynamic equivalency is to make the Bible readable, conveying an idea-for-idea rendering of the original. That means someone must first decide what idea is being communicated, which is the very act of interpretation.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> John Piper, “Which Bible Translation is Best?”; online at <http://www.gty.org/resources/Questions/QA167/Which-Bible-translation-is-best>.

First, as Dr. MacArthur himself stated above “every translation involves some degree of interpretation.” Secondly, the primary “goal of dynamic equivalency is” *not* “to make the Bible readable” as Dr. MacArthur disparagingly suggests, but to make it a more accurate translation of the original meaning into the recipients language. Thirdly, we find the same disparagement of translators interpreting Scripture that Dr. Piper expressed above. And our question is the same: Who better to interpret and translate obscurities in these ancient languages than the foremost scholars of these languages in the world? Dr. MacArthur? Why would we trust him more than they?

Finally, Dr. MacArthur is irresponsible and unnecessarily slanderous when he writes:

How the translators view Scripture becomes extremely important in the final product. Sadly, there are many in the Bible-translation industry who have a low view of the Scripture. They think the Bible is merely a product of man, replete with mistakes, contradictions, and personal biases. Many translators today have also adopted the postmodern idea of elevating the experience of the reader over the intention of the author. They make the contemporary reader sovereign over the text and demote the intended meaning of the historic human writers who were carried along by one divine author (2 Peter 1:19-21).

Therefore, it’s vital that you find a translation that represents what the Holy Spirit actually said as faithfully as possible. Who’s interested in some contemporary translation committee’s spin on what they think contemporary readers want to read? We want to read what the author intended us to read, which is what the Holy Spirit originally inspired.

Who are we to assume make up the “many in the Bible-translation industry who have a low view of the Scripture?” Apparently, “many” of the “contemporary translation committees,” which would obviously include the NIV, NLT, etc. This is a fine way to argue the issue of “literal” vs. “dynamic” Bible translation—just accuse “dynamic” translators of having a low view of Scripture, thinking Scripture is full of mistakes, elevating the experience of the reader over the intention of the author, and desiring to merely put their own “spin” on what people want to read, rather than on what God said. Like we said, inaccurate and irresponsible. Elsewhere we have quoted other similar statements by Dr. MacArthur regarding gender-inclusive translations.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> For other exaggerated and even slanderous accusations regarding gender-inclusive translations see section 15.3.B.

In summary, we would claim for the reasons above that a “dynamic” “thought-for-thought” approach to translation is generally superior to a more “literal” “word-for-word” approach, despite the opinions of several popular and rightly respected Bible Teachers. And our claim will be further demonstrated in the following chapters as well.

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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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### ***Gauging Your Grasp***

- 1) What do we claim is the weaknesses of a “literal” approach to translation? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 2) What is our recommendation regarding paraphrases? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 3) What are the several reasons we believe “dynamic” translation is superior? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) What are John Piper’s four “convictions” regarding the superiority of “literal” translations? How do we answer each? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) What is our opinion of John MacArthur’s comments on modern Bible translations? Do you agree or disagree and why?

### ***Recommended Reading***

- See those listed here in chapter 15.1.

### ***Publications & Particulars***



## Chapter 15.3

# The Superiority of Gender-Inclusive Translations

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### *Table of Topics*

- A) Introduction to Gender-accurate Bible Translations**
- B) The Slandorous Sensationalism Infused into the Debate**
- C) Has the English Language Changed?**
- D) The Gender-inclusive Apostle Paul**
- E) The Difficulty of Masculine Pronouns**
- F) A Few of the Many Examples Where Gender-inclusive Language Improves Accuracy**
- G) The Few Examples Where Gender-inclusive Translation Seems to be a Mistake**

*Extras & Endnotes*

### **Primary Points**

- Now we're getting to the real hot potato in modern Bible translation.
- Even though the actual original Hebrew and Greek words *do not* mean just "men," many Evangelicals insisting they must still be translated as such.
- Traditional translations make many Bible verses seem only to apply to men. The debate is not about gender "neutrality," but gender "accuracy."
- Not only does gender-inclusive language more accurately reflect the original intentions of biblical writers, but it also better reflects English.
- For most Americans the words "he," "man," and "brothers" often exclude females, which in many cases was not the intention of the biblical writers. Are feminist influences really the cause of this?
- Critics of gender-inclusive translations seem rather hypocritical when their flagship translation, the ESV has changed over 700 occurrences of the word "man" or "men" to be more gender-inclusive. This is rather remarkable when the impetus for creating the ESV was concern for the same thing in the updated NIV.
- While critics of the updated NIV have slandered the motives, character, and scholarship of its translators, D. A. Carson has written: "Some of them are among the godliest, most competent,

## A) Introduction to Gender-accurate Bible Translations

Now we're getting to the real hot potato in modern Bible translation. In general, what we are talking about is the tendency of modern translations to replace the word "men" or "brothers" with "people" or "brothers and sisters," *when the original Hebrew or Greek word does not refer to just men*. Read that again, because this is the essential issue. Even though the actual original Hebrew and Greek words *do not* mean just "men" or "man" many Evangelicals today are insisting they must still be translated in a masculine way.<sup>67</sup> What the gender-inclusive debate is about among Evangelicals *is not* changing biblical references to God to "she" as has been widely feared.

For example, notice how the NASB translates the Greek *anthrōpos* ["humans" "humankind," rarely "man"] in 1 Timothy 2:1-5. Could someone not legitimately conclude that prayers and salvation are just for men?

**First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men [*anthrōpos*: "humans"], <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. <sup>3</sup>This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who desires all men [*anthrōpos*] to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup>For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men [*anthrōpos*], *the man* [*anthrōpos*] Christ Jesus. (cf. KJV, NKJV, RSV; 1984 NIV)**

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<sup>67</sup> Drs. Fee and Strauss note:

None of the versions discussed in this chapter introduce feminine language for God or eliminate masculine pronouns or metaphors used for Him. There are indeed a few feminist versions that do so, such as *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* (1995) and *The Inclusive Bible* (2007) produced by Priests for Equality.

But these versions have a very different agenda, seeking to eliminate patriarchal references from the Bible. This is a completely different goal from gender accuracy, which is to reflect as accurately as possible the original meaning of the text. Gender accurate versions seek to introduce inclusive language only with reference to human beings and only when the original meaning included both sexes. (*How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions* (Zondervan, 2007).

It is because of such translations that NT scholar John Kohlenberger had the following experience with his daughter:

“Daddy, why does God only like boys?” Caught off guard by this startling question, I didn’t know how to answer my eight-year-old daughter. “Where did you get that idea?” I asked. “From the Bible,” she replied. “When we memorize verses in Sunday School or for AWANA or at school, they always say ‘Blessed is the man’ and ‘How can a young man keep his way pure’ and ‘I will make you fishers of men.’ Why isn’t there anything about girls being blessed or girls getting saved?”<sup>68</sup>

Again, remembering that in koinē Greek, the vast majority of the time *anthrōpos* meant “a person of either sex, with focus on participation in the human race, *a human being*,”<sup>69</sup> we can see why the updated NIV is a better translation, not only because it is better modern English, but because it more accurately reflects the meaning of the Greek:

**I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—<sup>2</sup> for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.<sup>3</sup> This is good, and pleases God our Savior,<sup>4</sup> who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.<sup>5</sup> For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus (cf. NLT, ESV)**

Quite frankly, I like the NET, NCV, CEV, and the much maligned TNIV translations even better, because the reference to Jesus as an *anthrōpos* (v. 5) is translated “**human being**,” rather than “**man**.”<sup>70</sup> Of course He was a man, but it was not because of His masculinity that He is the mediator between God and all humans,

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<sup>68</sup> ref. unavailable.

<sup>69</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), F. W. Danker, ed., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 2001)

<sup>70</sup> Dr. Carson also supports the gender-inclusive translation of 1 Timothy 2:5. See *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism*, D. A. Carson (Baker, 1998), 127.

but because He was a human! And all translations should reflect that, especially because that is what *anthrōpos* means.

Simply put, there are many cases like 1 Timothy 2:1-5 where a gender-inclusive approach actually communicates the original intention of the Apostles better than those who neglect this approach. Accordingly, Drs. Fee and Strauss comment:

[W]e are not advocating the blanket replacement of masculine terms with inclusive language. This is not about gender “neutrality” (as some have claimed), but about gender “accuracy.” The goal is not to eliminate gender distinctions in Scripture, but to clarify them. . . .<sup>71</sup>

Not only does gender-inclusive language more accurately reflect the original intentions of biblical writers, but it also better reflects modern English. Drs. Fee and Strauss write:

One of the most significant changes in English over the last quarter century has been related to gender language. While it was once commonplace to refer to people as “men” and all fellow Christians as “brothers,” such usage has declined significantly in recent years. More inclusive terms like “people” and “brothers and sisters” are used more often today.

Bible translators, seeking to stay current with contemporary English, have adapted to these changes. Over the past thirty years, almost every English Bible version either produced or revised has adopted this kind of “gender accurate” language (TNIV, NET, NLT, GW, CEV, NAB, NJB, NRSV, REB, NCV, GNT, NIrV). This is in line with the goal of translating words according to their meaning in context. Even versions like the ESV and HCSB, which have intentionally reacted against the trend toward gender inclusive language, utilize it far more than their predecessors. . . .

While some critics claim that the movement toward gender accurate language is a form of political correctness, the truth is that such language has made our Bible translations more precise and so more accurate.<sup>72</sup>

Imagine giving a sermon to your congregation, filled equally with men and women. And as you deliver your message, you refer to them only as men when you address them. There are at least as

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<sup>71</sup> Fee & Strauss.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 1563-1565.

many women listening as men, but instead of addressing the audience as “fellow believers,” “Christians,” “brothers and sisters,” etc., you consistently say things like, “men, we need to apply this message,” “men, God loves you,” “thank God men that He saved you.” Wouldn’t that be inappropriate? Maybe even disrespectful and offensive.

In summary, we would say this. If we look closely at each of the hundreds of verses involved, we will find in the vast majority of cases that the gender-inclusive translations are a significant improvement over older translations, like the example above regarding 1 Timothy 2:1-5. They communicate in modern English better because they recognize that for most Americans the words “he,” “man,” and “brothers,” often exclude females, which in many cases was not the intention of the biblical writers. Accordingly, these translations also more accurately translate the Hebrew and Greek because the original words allow for more gender-inclusive meanings and the context usually demands it.

Unfortunately, critics of the gender-inclusive approach begin in error, when, in a rather official statement,<sup>73</sup> they state:

- “‘man’ should ordinarily be used to designate the human race.”<sup>74</sup> That does not reflect modern English.
- *Adelphos* (“brother”) should never be translated as “brothers and sisters.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> The “official statement” of the critics of gender-inclusive language is referred to as the Colorado Springs Guidelines (CSG), developed literally overnight in a hotel room by an assorted group of Pastors and Christian leaders and relatively few ancient language scholars. Accordingly, Dr. Carson comments: “By and large, the CSG are open to far more and far more serious linguistic objections than the [NIV] principles.” 111. See chapter 2 for the text of these guidelines, and chapter 5 for Dr. Carson’s evaluation of them.

<sup>74</sup> Carson, 120.

<sup>75</sup> On the critics insistence that *adelphos* cannot be translated “brother and sister” Dr. Carson comments:

Why [they] insist on excluding inclusive language for the singular form quite escapes me. . . . In Matthew 5:22 NIV Jesus says, “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother [*adelphos*] will be subject to judgment.” Is Jesus restricting the sanction to anger toward a brother, but not a sister? The NIV’s “brother or sister” is surely preferable. Why concede the point for the plural [*adelphoi*: “brothers”] and deny it for the singular? (131).

- *Anthrōpos* (“humans”) should normally be translated as “men”.
- The use of masculine pronouns such as “he” and “him” must be retained even though in the original text they are referring to people in general.<sup>76</sup>

And critics of gender-inclusive translations seem rather hypocritical when their flagship translation, the ESV, which is based on the text of the older RSV, has changed over 700 occurrences of the word “man” or “men” to be more gender-inclusive.<sup>77</sup> This is

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<sup>76</sup> Carson, 44. Carson responds to the claim that masculine pronouns in the Hebrew and Greek must be translated as masculine in English:

There are countless passages of . . . gender complexity in the Hebrew Old Testament, which cannot be faithfully rendered into English by formal [“literal”] equivalents. So when we are told, in a careful selection of instances, that we must have the masculine pronoun where the Hebrew has the masculine pronoun, or else we are sacrificing or twisting the Word of God, the kindest thing that can be said is that honest concern for the integrity of the Word of God has blinded the critic to two facts:

(1) the original words of God were (in these cases) in Hebrew, not English; and (2) Hebrew and English do not have the same gender systems. Formal [“literal”] equivalents are often impossible. If in some places formal equivalents are possible, even that does not necessarily mean they are right or best . . .

In exactly the same way that one cannot responsibly translate a Greek genitive absolute into English as an English genitive absolute *because the syntactical structures of the two languages are different*, so one cannot responsibly translate all Greek-specified genders into English as corresponding English genders, because the gender system of the two languages is different. . . .

[T]he argument that attaches a particular formal equivalent in gender assignment to faithfulness to the Word of God is profoundly mistaken in principle. It understands neither translation nor gender systems. (97-98). Dr. Carson is responding to Wayne Grudem’s paper, “What’s Wrong with Gender-Neutral Bible Translations?” (CBMW, 1997).

<sup>77</sup>

Source online at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/wp-content/uploads/cbt-response-to-cbmw-review.pdf>. For examples in Matthew and Romans, see “The Gender-Neutral Language of the *English Standard Version* (ESV), Compiled by Mark L. Strauss, PhD; online at <http://bible-translation.110mb.com/esvlinks.htm>

rather remarkable when the impetus for creating the ESV was concern for the same thing in the updated NIV.<sup>78</sup>

## B) The Slandering Sensationalism Infused into the Debate

The issue over gender inclusive translations has some complexity. But first, let's confront the exaggerated and slanderous nature of the accusations that are being made by many regarding the motives of the translators of the NIV, NLT, or other modern translations. NT scholar D. A. Carson has done just that in his book *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism*. In it Dr. Carson relates:

What ignited the flame of indignation and condemnation, inaugurating the brouhaha, was an article by Susan Olasky in *World*. This conservative magazine advertises itself as a weekly news magazine like *Time* or *Newsweek*, but something you can trust. The front cover for March 29, 1997, features a Bible with a red sign for the female on the spine, and the shadow of a stealth aircraft draped across the leather binding. The words read: "The Stealth Bible: The Popular *New International Version* Bible Is Quietly Going 'Gender-Neutral.'" The article itself is entitled: "The Feminist Seduction of the Evangelical Church."<sup>79</sup>

Dr. Carson adds:

I have recently read again all the *World* articles on this subject, and the scholars who make up the CBT [NIV translation committee], as these articles present them, are pretty horrible people. I do not personally know all the members of the CBT, but I know quite a few of them. Some of them are among the godliest, most competent, experienced,

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<sup>78</sup> Mark Strauss writes The ESV arose in part as a response against the gender-inclusive language of other versions like the TNIV and the NLT. At the same time, the ESV revisers obviously recognized the major changes in gender-language taking place in English, since they removed the words "man" or "men" 671 times from the RSV! ("Why the English Standard Version (ESV) Should Not Become the Standard English Version," Available online at: <http://zondervan.typepad.com/files/improvingesv2.pdf>)

<sup>79</sup> Carson, 29.

mature Christian thinkers and scholars I know—and not a few of them are complimentarians [upholding the traditional biblical understanding of gender roles in the family and Church].<sup>80</sup>

Similar sensationalism has come from the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), with a member, Peter Jones writing in 2002 regarding the appearance of gender-inclusive Bible translations:

I do not believe I am exaggerating when I say that we are witnessing a social revolution that is determined to erase from the cultural memory of the 'Christian' West both the normativity of heterosexual gender and role distinctions and the patriarchal God of the Bible. Essential to the revolution is the control and manipulation of language.<sup>81</sup>

In fact, Dr. Jones was "exaggerating" and there is no evidence or reason to suggest that Evangelical, gender-inclusive translations of Scripture have contributed to feminists' agendas. It is because of both inaccuracies and unnecessary fervor over the gender-inclusive version of the NIV that Dr. Carson removed himself from the Council of Reference for the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.<sup>82</sup>

Even more recently, the CBMW has claimed regarding the translation committee of the 2011 NIV update that, "gender translation decisions were motivated by a desire to avoid causing offense" and a "'guilt-by-association' labeling of some of [the] translations . . . [because] some renderings in the updated NIV are adopted also by 'feminist' interpreters."<sup>83</sup>

Likewise, the Southern Baptist Convention has accused the NIV translators of "altering the meaning of hundreds of verses, most significantly by erasing gender-specific details which appear in the

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<sup>80</sup> Carson, 195.

<sup>81</sup> Peter Jones, "The TNIV: Gender Accurate or Ideologically Egalitarian," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 7 (Fall 2002), 18.

<sup>82</sup> Carson, 200.

<sup>83</sup> "A Brief Response from the Committee on Bible Translation to the Review of the updated NIV by the Committee on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood"; online at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/wp-content/uploads/cbt-response-to-cbmw-review.pdf>.

original languages” and that they have “gone beyond acceptable translation standards.”<sup>84</sup> As will be demonstrated below, this is simply not true.

Unfortunately, Dr. Carson’s “Plea for Realism” has been necessary because good men like Wayne Grudem, John Piper,<sup>85</sup> John MacArthur, and J. I. Packer<sup>86</sup> have greatly exaggerated the supposed errors and dangers of the updated NIV, NLT, or other gender-inclusive translations, and slandered the motives of those on these translation teams. For example, John MacArthur writes:

We live in a day when culture is telling the church what the Bible will be allowed to say. A great illustration of this is the publication of the TNIV. Zondervan Publishing Company produces a Bible called the TNIV, the TNIV is distinguished by its deference to the Feminist Movement. It has altered the Word of God, changed the Word of God to make it compatible to the contemporary Feminist Egalitarian Movement and that is not the only one that has done that, there are others that have done it as well.

The Word of God is not ever to be used in such a way as to accommodate a cultural perception. You do not take the Word of God, twist the Word of God, alter the Word of God, change the Word of God, embellish the Word of God, diminish the Word of God, in order to achieve something that accommodates cultural expectations. But that is being done and it's being done at the very core when it's being done with Bible translation.

When you translate a Bible, you have one responsibility. You take the Word in the original Hebrew or Aramaic in the few places in the Old Testament where Aramaic occurs. You take

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<sup>84</sup> A brief response from the Committee on Bible Translation to the resolution introduced on the floor of the Southern Baptist Convention regarding the updated New International Version; online at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/wp-content/uploads/cbt-response-to-sbc.pdf>.

<sup>85</sup> John Piper, “What Does John Piper Think of the TNIV?”; online at <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/what-does-john-piper-think-about-the-tniv>. Which is really a critique of “thought for thought” translations, rather than gender-inclusive ones.

<sup>86</sup> J. I. Packer wrote of the NIVi: “Adjustments made by what I call the feminist edition [of the NIV] are not made in the interests of legitimate translation procedure. These changes have been made to pander to a cultural prejudice that I hope will be short-lived.” Quoted by Carson, 31.

## 15.3: Gender-inclusive Translations

the Word in the Greek in the New Testament and you translate it. You find the closest possible translation in the language into which you're translating the Bible and that's what you do. You do not change the word because you think the culture would like it to be said another way. That's not a true and pure translation, especially do you not adapt the Bible to sinful cultural attitudes, expectations, demands. That's the worst of all.<sup>87</sup>

Several responses are in order. First, there is no Bible teacher I respect more than John MacArthur. However, this is the most inaccurate, irresponsible, and embarrassing thing I have ever encountered from him. Elsewhere we quoted a similar statement from him regarding "dynamic" translation in general.<sup>88</sup>

Secondly, the TNIV that Dr. MacArthur refers to was a significantly more conservative update of the original NIVi. Read Dr. Carson's review of the latter and decide for yourself if Dr. MacArthur seems either accurate or sane here.

Finally, when we note that the translation teams for these versions are made up of the most respected, knowledgeable, conservative, and Evangelical scholars in the world,<sup>89</sup> these accusations seem even more outlandish and misplaced. As Dr. Carson has said, "Whatever my errors and blind spots, I cannot fairly be accused of adopting the stances I do in translation because I am driven by some feminist agenda."<sup>90</sup> And if you have read the Bible commentaries of the men on these translation committees you would know the same is true of them.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> John MacArthur, "Assorted Attacks on the Bible"; online at [www.gty.org/resources/PDF/Sermons/90-320](http://www.gty.org/resources/PDF/Sermons/90-320).

<sup>88</sup> For Dr. MacArthur's rather outlandish accusations regarding "dynamic" translation see section 15.2.D.3.

<sup>89</sup> For a list of the members of the translation teams of the NIV and NLT see sections 15.4.B.1 and 15.4.C.

<sup>90</sup> Carson, 1

<sup>91</sup> For responses by the translation committee of the updated NIV to their critics in the Southern Baptist Convention and the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood see online at: <http://www.niv-cbt.org/wp-content/uploads/cbt-response>.

As we point out elsewhere, very significant changes have been made in the 2011 NIV since the NIVi in 1996. Accordingly, a great deal of the reasons given by the above people and organizations for denouncing the NIV have been eliminated. Nonetheless, inaccurate, unfair, and exaggerated press still occur.

## C) Has the English Language Changed?

Virtually all would agree that in generations past the word "man" was readily recognized to refer to humanity or people in general, including males and females. Those days are long since past. Nevertheless, critics of gender-inclusive translations insist that: 1) Masculine words such as "man," "he," or "brothers" are still normally used to include both males and females, and 2) if there are changes in usage, they have resulted from feminist influences in our culture and should be resisted.

On the first point, it has been scientifically proven that the pronoun "he" or the noun "man" are not normally used in modern English to refer to humanity in general, or to include both males and females.<sup>92</sup> Accordingly, even in 1998, Dr. Carson wrote regarding gender meanings in modern English: "[T]he changes are farther advanced in the English language than the critics think, even if not as far advanced as some feminists think."<sup>93</sup>

On the second point, do we really need to blame feminism for the fact that for most Americans the word "men" or "brothers" does not mean "men and women"? Isn't this simply a natural progression in English and even an improvement? And does the fact that the word "men" is no longer usually recognized as meaning

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<sup>92</sup> As noted above, the translation committee for the NIV update in 2011 used a very extensive study of modern English. The findings included:

Between 1990 and 2009, instances of masculine generic pronouns [e.g. "he" used to refer to both males and females] . . . expressed as a percentage of total generic pronoun usage in general written English, fell from 22% to 8%. . . . [W]hen . . . referring either to all humans or to smaller subsets of humanity . . . *people* is by far the most frequent synonym, followed by *humans*. . . . [*M*]an and *mankind* have become steadily less frequent (with some fluctuations) over the 20-year course of the study.

For the full report see online at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/information/collins-corpus-report/>.

<sup>93</sup> Carson, 190.

humanity in general or “males and females” really threaten the Evangelical desire to uphold biblical gender roles in the Church as Scripture says? We doubt it.

In fact, we should have some concern to not unnecessarily seem bigoted by modern America. While there are limits to such concessions, we agree with Dr. Carson who remarks: “I do not want the old NIV when I am expounding the earlier chapters of, say, Romans in an evangelical setting in a university. Nothing is gained by it, and too much is lost.”<sup>94</sup> This is precisely because of how words like “he” and “man” and “brother” function in modern English in America.

Accordingly, the conservative and Evangelical NT scholar Grant Osborne writes:

In the ancient world it was common to say “man” or “he” when speaking of all people. The influence of the KJV has made it common until recent years to do the same. Within the last two decades, however, this is practiced less and less, and those who have not grown up in the church can misunderstand such male-oriented language. Even if the inclusive *he* is retained in some stylebooks, it is impossible to deny that its occurrence is becoming rarer or that ultimately it is on its way out in modern language. A basic principle of all translation theory is to express the ancient text in the thoughts and idioms of the receptor language. . . . It is likely that Paul today would not use such unnecessarily offensive language as *man* or *he* when it refers to men and women.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>95</sup> Grant Osborne, “Do Inclusive-Language Bibles Distort Scripture?” *Christianity Today*, October 27, 1997.

## D) The Gender-inclusive Apostle Paul

Rather remarkably, we have an instance where the Apostle Paul intentionally changed an OT text to be gender-inclusive. 2 Samuel 7:14 in the ESV reads: **“I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.”** Yet when the Apostle quotes this verse in the NT he writes: **“I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty”** (2 Cor 6:18 ESV). Accordingly, Dr. Carson writes:

Note carefully what the apostle Paul has done. He has taken the third-person singular (“*he* will be a *son* to me”) and rewritten it as a second-person plural . . . [and] in terms that expand the masculine “son” into both genders: “*you* shall be *sons and daughters* to me.”

Nor is it the case in this passage that Paul is simply citing the common Greek version—some form of the Septuagint (LXX)—without worrying too much about the details, for here the LXX follows the Hebrew rather closely. Nor can one easily imagine that Paul was ignorant of the Hebrew and LXX texts. Even the more biblically literate in the Corinthian congregation would have been familiar with at least the Greek [LXX] text, so they would have detected the changes Paul has introduced. . .

[T]he least we can say is that the apostle himself does not think that Hebrew singulars must always be rendered by Greek singulars, or that the Hebrew “son” should never be rendered by the Greek “sons and daughters.” No one, I think, would quickly charge Paul with succumbing to a feminist agenda.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Carson, 20. Illustrating the rather desperate measures that the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood will go to in order to denounce any argument for gender-inclusive translation, James W. Scott argues against Carson’s understanding of the relationship between 2 Samuel 7:14 and 2 Corinthians 6:18. (see online at <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-5-No-1/The-Gender-Inclusive-Apostle>).

The reason for doing so is clear, as Scott himself admits that if Carson’s view were true, “one could hardly argue that gender-inclusive translation undermines the biblical view of gender or is otherwise improper.” The first thing that can be said about Scott’s article is that it is obscure, and rather difficult to make sense of. Secondly, he claims that Paul gets “**and daughters**” not from adding to 2 Samuel 7:14, but interrupts his obvious quote of 2 Samuel 7:14, and inserts a phrase from Isaiah 43:6. Of course, Scott could find many places in the OT where the phrase “**sons**

## E) The Difficulty of Masculine Pronouns

This section will be relegated primarily to the endnotes. However, it is such a central issue in the gender-inclusive debate that we will mention it in the main text. Critics of dynamic translations accuse translators of distorting the word of God when they render a masculine singular pronoun like “he” in the Hebrew or Greek, into something like the singular “they” in English. For example, Dr. Grudem writes:

I strongly disagree with this procedure. The evangelical doctrine of Scripture is that every word of the original is exactly what God wanted it to be, because ‘all Scripture is God-breathed’ (2 Tim 3:16). If God caused Psalm 1 to be written with singular nouns and pronouns, then we should reflect the sense of those words in English translation. We must not ‘substitute’ other words with different senses.”<sup>97</sup>

What Dr. Grudem chooses to ignore is that such a “substitute” is necessary, because as Drs. Fee, Strauss, and Carson point out in the endnote: “English does not have a [gender] inclusive singular pronoun (“it” only works for things, not for people).” In fact, these scholars note that the Apostle Paul on at least three occasions, while quoting an OT verse using a masculine pronoun such as “him,” “his,” or “he,” replaced these terms with “those,” “their,” and “they.” Accordingly, we would promote the increasing use of “they” as a singular pronoun in modern English to refer to a person in general, rather than the use of “he” as critics insist.<sup>98</sup>

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**and daughters”** is used, why choose this one? Again, this simply strikes us as desperation

<sup>97</sup> Wayne Grudem, “What’s Wrong with Gender-Neutral Bible Translations?” (CBMW, 1997), 11.

<sup>98</sup> Dr. Strauss explains:

One of the most difficult and complex issues related to gender language involves resumptive masculine pronouns. These are pronouns that follow an indefinite noun or pronoun and refer back to it. Consider the following sentence: “If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (John 8:51 NIV).

Although the word “anyone” is generic, referring to either men or women, the resumptive pronoun “he” is masculine. Ideally, it should be neutral to agree with its antecedent “anyone.” But English does not have an inclusive third person singular pronoun (“it” only works

for things, not for people). Using “he or she” can be awkward and cumbersome.

There are several ways to translate the sentence:

1. Use a masculine pronoun (as above): “If anyone keeps my word, he will not see death.”
2. Pluralize the construction: “Those who keep my word will not see death.”
3. Use a singular “they”: “If anyone keeps my word, they will not see death.”
4. Use a second person: “If you keep my word you will not see death.”
5. Use a noun instead of a pronoun: “If anyone keeps my word, that person will not see death.”
6. Modify the construction to eliminate the pronoun: “Whoever keeps my word will not see death.”

All of these represent accurate translations, since they all express the generic meaning that a person who follows Jesus’ message will not experience spiritual death. Yet all also have some inconsistency. . . . There is no perfect solution and translators must make difficult choices.

Some opponents of inclusive language claim that only the first option is accurate, since it is the most “literal.” But this is not actually true. In the Greek sentence of John 8:51, there is no masculine pronoun “he.” The verb “will see” is in the third person singular (he, she, it), but verbs in Greek do not specify gender. Even if a masculine pronoun were present, it would not mean “he,” since pronouns get their meaning from the noun or pronoun they replace, in this case “anyone.”

The important thing to remember is that the meaning, not the form, must be retained in translation. Using a second person (“you” — option 4) works in the example above because in English we often use “you” in generic sentences. . . . Some English stylists consider singular “they” (option 3) to be ungrammatical and warn against its use. Increasingly, however, stylists and English handbooks accept it as legitimate and point to its long and venerable history in the English language . . .

Most English speakers today would find it awkward to say, “Everybody likes ice cream, doesn’t he?” even though that is grammatically “correct” (according to some grammarians). Instead most people would say: “Everybody likes ice cream, don’t they?” This is a singular “they.” In light of its long history in the English language and growing acceptance as standard English, contemporary English Bible versions have begun to use it more often. . . .

[Our claim that] pluralizing does not necessarily distort the meaning of the text comes from the Bible itself, since biblical writers sometimes translate masculine singular generics with plural constructions. Consider these examples, where the apostle Paul

Regarding Dr. Grudem's argument above, Dr. Carson has answered:

That is exactly the same argument used to defend the preservation of singular "thou" a few decades ago. The common problem is the failure to recognize the preserving God's word in Psalm 1 means preserving Hebrew words, which are tied to semantic ranges, syntactical structures, gender and number systems, morphology, and other phenomena that are radically different in English—and further that English is changing.

This emotive way of putting things implies that those who disagree with Dr. Grudem's views on translation are disparaging or ignoring "the evangelical doctrine of Scripture." Most emphatically is that not the case, and it would be

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quotes from the Old Testament: cf. Isa 52:7 with Rom 10:15b; Ps 36:1b with Rom 3:10, 18; Ps 32:1 with Rom 4:6-7).

In all three cases Paul translated Hebrew singulars with Greek plurals. He clearly recognized that generic plurals in Greek accurately represent the meaning of generic singulars in Hebrew. He changed the form but retained the meaning. Fee, Gordon D.; Strauss, Mark L. (2009-05-19). *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions* (Kindle Locations 1683-1702). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

More specifically, Dr. Carson has commented on this issue:

[T]he critics [of dynamic translations] seem to assume it is always inappropriate to render a singular [in the original] with a plural [in English]. . . . I do not see how that position can be maintained. . . . One is dealing with systems of language structures; one does not have the right to assume that singular and plural forms function in Hebrew and Greek exactly as they function in English. But even in English we sometimes use the singular generically. . . .

[E]ven if (and it is a big "if") the purpose of a singular form is to say something about the individual, if the only corresponding individual expression in English is one that is gender-specific ["he"] and will be read in those parts of the English speaking world where such gender specificity carries overtones of bigotry [which it does in 21<sup>st</sup> century America], *not carried by the donor text*, then the responsible translator is faced with an awkward choice: Preserve the singular form and project bigotry [because the use of "he" does not reflect the author's intention of including more than a male], or go with a plural form ["they"] and [possibly, though not necessarily based on common usage] lose the individual reference. (105-106)

exceedingly helpful if the charge, doubtless made in good faith, were withdrawn.<sup>99</sup>

## F) A Few of the Many Examples Where Gender-inclusive Language Improves Accuracy

We believe there are hundreds of these, and others have listed them in more detail.<sup>100</sup> However, for our purposes, a relatively few examples will have to suffice:

### Genesis 6:7

**ESV: So the LORD said, "I will blot out man [*adam*: man, human] whom I have created from the face of the land, man [*adam*] and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."**

**NIV: So the LORD said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them."**

**NLT: And the LORD said, "I will wipe this human race I have created from the face of the earth. Yes, and I will destroy every living thing—all the people, the large animals, the small animals that scurry along the ground, and even the birds of the sky. I am sorry I ever made them."**

"**Human race**" and "**people**" are legitimate translations of the Hebrew word *adam*, and better communicate Moses' original meaning than the rather exclusive term "**man**."

### Matthew 4:19

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<sup>99</sup> Carson, 206.

<sup>100</sup> Mark Strauss, "Why the English Standard Version (ESV) Should Not Become the Standard English Version," Available online at: <http://zondervan.typepad.com/files/improvingesv2.pdf>.

**ESV: And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men [*anthrōpōn*]."**

**NIV: "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."**

**NLT: Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!"**

The primary meaning of the Greek word *anthrōpōn* is humanity, not men, so the ESV translation is not as accurate to the Greek text, let alone the English language.

### Matthew 12:12

**ESV: How much more valuable then is a man [*anthrōpos*] than a sheep!**

**NIV & NLT: How much more valuable is a person than a sheep!**

Not only does the NLT miss the meaning of *anthrōpos* again, but Jesus' intentional use of this word instead of *aner*, which more likely means specifically men, is important to maintain, especially because we have cultures and religions that value women no more than animals.

### Matthew 16:24-26

**ESV: Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone [*tis*] would come after me, let him [not in Greek text] deny himself [*eauton*: "himself" or "oneself"] and take up his [*auton*: lit. "self"] cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For whoever would save his [*auton*] life will lose it, but whoever loses his [*auton*] life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will it profit a man [*anthrōpos* "person" not "man"] if he [not in Greek text] gains the whole world and forfeits his [*auton*] soul? Or what shall a man [*anthrōpos* "person" not "man"] give in return for his [*auton*] soul?**

**NIV: Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me**

**will find it.<sup>26</sup> What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?** (cf. NLT)

Despite Dr. Piper's objections to the NIV here, it is both more accurate to the Greek and English, as Dr. Carson has demonstrated.<sup>101</sup>

### Luke 17:3

ESV: **If your brother [*adelphos*: "brother" or "brother and sister" acc. to *BADG*] sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.**

NIV: **If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.**

NLT: **If another believer sins, rebuke that person; then if there is repentance, forgive.**

### John 1:4

ESV: **In him was life, and the life was the light of men [*anthrōpoi*].**

NIV: **In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.**

NLT: **The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.**

The ESV translation is especially curious here, as a few verses later it translates: "**The true light, which enlightens everyone** [*pas anthrōpos*]" (v. 9).

### John 10:33

ESV: **The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy,**

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<sup>101</sup> Carson, 148-9. For additional corrections that Dr. Carson makes to Drs. Piper's and Grudem's criticisms of the NIVi see esp. chapter 7.

**because you, being a man [*anthrōpos*], make yourself God."**

**NIV: "We are not stoning you for any good work," they replied, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." (cf. NLT)**

**CEV: They answered, "We are not killing you because of any good work you did, but because you speak against God. You are only a human, but you say you are the same as God!"**

Here, virtually all translations fail to take the opportunity to make a more accurate translation. Dr. Carson's comments here pertain to the initial gender-inclusive edition of the NIV (NIVi, 1996) that is not even in print, and one wonders if the changes made in the latest NIV were due more to pressure than anything else. Nonetheless, Dr. Carson rightly remarks:

In John 10:33 NIV [1984] some Jews accuse Jesus of blasphemy "because you, a mere man (*anthrōpos*), claim to be God." The NIVi translates the critical expression, "a mere human being." Dr. Andreas Köstenberger says that this downplays Jesus' maleness during his earthly incarnate state [*CBMW News* 2.3 (June 1997)].

Dr. Köstenberger is a capable scholar and a former student whom I esteem highly. But here he has made a linguistic gaffe . . . The meaning of *anthrōpos* is human being, not male human being. The Jews are accusing Jesus of elevating not his maleness to the level of deity, but his humanness. No one is doubting Jesus' maleness; the NIVi only uses male pronouns for him.<sup>102</sup>

### John 11:25

**ESV: Jesus said to her [a woman!], "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.**

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<sup>102</sup> Carson, 126-7.

**NIV: Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.**

**NLT: Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying.**

Romans 5:18

**ESV: Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men [*anthrōpous*], so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men [*anthrōpous*].**

**NIV: Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.**

**NLT: Yes, Adam’s one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ’s one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone**

Romans 12:1

**ESV: I appeal to you therefore, brothers [*adelphoi*, plural, “brothers and sisters” <sup>103</sup>], by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**

**NIV: Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.**

**NLT: And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.**

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<sup>103</sup> BAGD.

The Greek plural noun *adelphoi* can refer to (1) brothers (male siblings); (2) siblings (i.e., brothers and sisters), or (3) people in some other close bond or association. Did Paul intend to only address men here? If not, then the ESV is a bad, misleading translation, of not only the author's original intent but of modern English usage. Ditto on the next passage.

### Phil 4:1

**ESV: Therefore, my brothers [*adelphoi*], whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.**

**NIV: Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!**

**NLT: Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.**

Accordingly, in the very next verse Paul encourages two women, Euodia and Syntyche, to live in harmony. Drs. Fee and Strauss remark:

This translation is not a "paraphrase" or a concession to a political correctness. It is exactly what the Greek term meant in its first-century context. The ESV, while consistently translating the term as "brothers," includes a footnote at its first occurrence in each book acknowledging that it actually means "brothers and sisters". . . .

This footnote reminds us that translation is not about "literally" reproducing words or the form of the text (in this case, a masculine form), but about accurately reproducing the meaning. The fact that *adelphoi* is one word in Greek while "brothers and sisters" is three words in English is irrelevant, so long as the meaning is retained. And the meaning in these passages is "brothers and sisters" or "fellow believers."<sup>104</sup>

### James 1:12

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<sup>104</sup> Fee & Strauss, *Translation*, Kindle Locations 1596-1611.

ESV: **Blessed is the man** [were only men meant here?] **who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.**

NIV: **Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.**

NLT: **God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.**

Admittedly, in this instance, the Greek word is *anēr* which most usually refers to a male. However, as Dr. Carson has demonstrated, “both in the lexica and in texts some extension [variance] is found.”<sup>105</sup>

### Rev 3:20

ESV: **Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.**

NIV: **Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.**

NLT: **“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.**

Drs. Fee and Strauss make an additional point regarding the translation of “sons” in Scripture:

Most common Hebrew and Greek terms for offspring (Heb.: *banim*; Gk.: *huioi*) can mean different things: “sons,” “children,” “grandchildren,” “descendants.” . . . Long before the contemporary debate over inclusive language, the KJV often rendered these terms inclusively as “children” rather than “sons.” The phrase “children of Israel” occurs 644 times

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<sup>105</sup> Carson, 161.

in the KJV. . . . Matthew 5:44-45 in the KJV reads, "Love your enemies . . . that ye may be the children [*huioi*] of your Father which is in heaven." In these and many other contexts, the term clearly refers generically to males and females — "children" rather than "sons."

Curiously, while the formal equivalent versions follow the KJV in translating *banim* as "children" in the Old Testament, in the New Testament they often revert back to "sons" (see Matt. 5:45 NKJV, NASB, RSV, ESV). These examples represent the tip of the iceberg. Thousands of passages could be cited from both the Old and New Testaments to show that gender accurate language more precisely represents the meaning of the original text.<sup>106</sup>

## G) The Few Examples Where Gender-inclusive Translation Seems to be a Mistake

To be fair, we do not agree with all of the decisions made by gender-inclusive translators.

### James 3:1

ESV: **Not many of you should become teachers [*didaskaloi*], my brothers [*adelphoi*], for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.**

NIV: **Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.**

NLT: **Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly.**

Obviously, this text is referring to the formal teaching ministry of the church. Dr. MacArthur writes: "*Didaskaloi* (**teachers**) was often used of rabbis and any who functioned in an official teaching or preaching role (cf. John 3:10), suggesting that James was speaking of the teaching office in the church (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph.

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<sup>106</sup> Fee & Strauss, *Translation*, Kindle Locations 1631-1641.

4:11)."<sup>107</sup> Dr. Moo concurs, stating the “**teacher**” being referred to here “in the early church was entrusted with the crucial task of transmitting Christian doctrine (see 2 Tim. 2:2).”<sup>108</sup>

According to 1 Timothy 2:11-12, women are not to be teachers in the general church context.<sup>109</sup> We commend the NLT translators for adding the footnote here: “Greek *brothers*; also in 3:10.” Accordingly, Drs. Fee and Strauss (the former believing that men and women should have the same roles in the church) are wrong, and Wayne Grudem is finally correct when we read:

Grudem objects to the TNIV’s use of the phrase “brothers and sisters” rather than simply “brothers” here largely because of his view that women should not have leadership roles in the church. However, all other occurrences of the term *adelphoi* in the book of James appear to be generic. That is, they include women as well as men based upon the context [*exactly*-context is key, and in 3:1 the context is a church office only held by men in the early Church].

So, due to a theological conviction, Grudem has objected here contrary to what the context might tell him [on the contrary- based on the clear meaning of 1 Tim 2:12]. By the way, even if the translation should properly be “brothers and sisters,” church leadership for women is not necessarily in view. Women can be teachers under the complementarian view, just not pastors or doctrinal teachers of men. [which is precisely what is being referred to here!] Grudem, in his zeal for his theological position, may have overstepped in his criticism on this point [not at all].<sup>110</sup>

## 2 Timothy 2:2

**ESV: and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men [*anthrōpōis*] who will be able to teach others also.**

<sup>107</sup> John MacArthur, *MacArthur’s New Testament Commentaries*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), James 3:1.

<sup>108</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James (TNTC)* (Eerdmans, 1985), 119.

<sup>109</sup> Regarding the Bible’s prohibition of women being teaching elders in the Church see section 7.14.G.1.

<sup>110</sup> Fee & Strauss, *Translation*.

**NIV: And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.**

**NLT: You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.**

Again, the Apostle is speaking of the transmission of doctrinal teaching in the general populace of the church, which in his previous letter to Timothy he had clearly stated was only the province of men (cf. 2 Tim 2:12). Accordingly, that should have been taken into consideration here.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> George Knight comments on 2 Timothy 2:2:

These “faithful” ones were men. Their task was “to teach” an audience that included the entire church, a task forbidden to women because of the men in the audience (1 Tim 2:12; cf. 1 Cor. 14:3ff.). These presbyters/overseers were required to be men in view of their duty to rule over their own households (1 Tim. 3:4-5; cf. Eph. 5:22ff.; 6:4; Col. 3:21). Therefore, *anthrōpos* is used here, as on occasion elsewhere in the NT (Mt. 19:5; 1 Cor. 7:1; Eph 5:31) and in the LXX (1 Esdras 9:40; Tobit 6:7) and other literature, of “man, adult male” . . . in contrast to a woman” (BAGD s.v. 2ba; cf. 2 Tim. 3:8) rather than in its more general sense [“people”]. (*The Pastoral Epistles (NIGNT)* [Eerdmans, 1992], 391).

While the egalitarian Gordon Fee uses the NIV text without questioning it, he refers to them as “people” with no argument to support it.

The best treatment of this text I can find is that of Denny Burk, associate Professor of NT and dean of Boyce College. In his blog entry: “How Should We Identify the Teachers in 2 Tim. 2:2?” he writes:

Dr. Blomberg’s argument favor of rendering *anthrōpois* as “people” is illuminating. 2 Timothy 2:2 has not been much of a flashpoint in the gender debate, and there is not much published material on the “men” vs. “people” question. Last week, I made my way through fourteen different commentaries on this verse. Out of the six of them that favored the translation “people,” not a single one of them put forth a sustained argument in favor of that translation. The most they have to offer is the observation that the plural of *anthropos* is regularly used generically. Thus Blomberg’s earlier post on this site is the most substantial argument in favor of “people” that I have read.

That being said, I do want to contest Dr. Blomberg’s conclusion that says “people” is “the only legitimate translation” of *anthrōpois*. It is true that the plural of *anthropos* is often used generically (e.g., 1 Tim 2:1, 4; 4:10; 6:5; 2 Tim 3:2; Titus 2:11; 3:2), but that fact is no

argument for a generic referent in a given context. As Ray Van Neste pointed out in his post, if we want to understand the word's appearance in 2 Timothy 2:2, we must look to context. So let me make some observations about the context that in my view tip the scales decisively in favor of the translation "men."

First, there is precedent in the pastorals for Paul's use of plural *anthropos* in a gender-specific way. In 2 Timothy 3:8, for instance, Paul writes, "Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth—**men** [*anthrōpoi*] of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected." The *anthrōpoi* here must be men since they are "worming their way into women's homes" (Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 550).

If this is correct, then the *anthrōpoi* of both 3:2 and 3:13 should be understood as males as well. Consider also the *anthrōpoi* of 1 Timothy 5:24: "The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after." In context, Paul is telling Timothy to be careful about whom he appoints as elders (v. 5:22: "Do not lay hands on a man too quickly"). Since Paul held to an all male eldership (1 Timothy 2:12; 3:2), the *anthrōpoi* of 5:24 must also be males. Given Paul's use of *anthrōpoi* in a gender-specific way both in the pastorals and elsewhere (e.g., 1 Corinthians 7:7), we have to allow for the possibility that context can determine *anthrōpoi* with a masculine referent.

Second, in the context of 2 Timothy 2, Paul is telling Timothy to entrust the gospel to faithful *anthrōpoi* who will be able to teach others (2:2). Notice the one qualification that Paul has for the *anthrōpoi*. They must be *qualified* to teach "others." This is significant because "others" is a masculine plural pronoun [ἐτέρους]. That means that "others" would consist of both men and women or of men only. Since Paul has already prohibited women from teaching Christian doctrine to men (1 Timothy 2:12), women would not be qualified to teach "others."

Thus, when Paul employs *anthrōpoi* here, he certainly has in mind males only. Contextually speaking, *anthrōpoi* must be gender-specific in this text. It seems that Paul wishes to emphasize the special responsibility that qualified men have to pass the faith on to the next generation.

With this interpretation in mind, we are in a position to answer the Blomberg's arguments in favor of "people."

1. Blomberg argues that "people" is a grammatical "slam dunk" because the plural of *anthropos* is "regularly" used in a gender-inclusive way. Nevertheless, the regular use of *anthropos* in a gender-inclusive way is not an argument for its meaning in a given context. Gender-specific uses of *anthropos* are also within the term's range of possible meanings, so the argument for "people" has to be developed within the context of 2 Timothy (and the other pastorals). I do not think Blomberg has provided such an argument yet.

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2. Blomberg argues that translating *anthropois* as “people” would not “infringe on those restrictions” Paul set up to prohibit women from teaching men. The problem with this argument is twofold. First, the term “others” is masculine plural, so the teaching of both men and women is in view. Thus, Blomberg cannot placate complementarian concerns with the suggestion that only the teaching of women and children is in view. Second, most English readers will read “people” in a gender-inclusive way. If Paul did not intend to be gender-inclusive in this text, why obscure the point for English readers?

3. Blomberg says that the translation “faithful men” will be heard by most readers as gender-specific, not as gender-inclusive. In this context, he is certainly right about this. But those who favor the translation “faithful men” do not do so because they believe “men” to be gender-inclusive. On the contrary, they favor “men” because they believe males are in view.

4. Blomberg also mentions his experience in parachurch organizations for whom this text is a staple. In those organizations, this text is a touchstone for understanding the organic disciple-making process that is incumbent upon all Christians, both men and women. I would argue that such organizations can still access this text in support of such disciple-making ministries. But when they do so, they should find that support in a legitimate *implication* of the text, not as Paul’s original *meaning*. In context, Paul is addressing the special responsibilities of church leadership who are supposed to be examples to the rest of the flock (1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7).

Finally, let me offer a word about how this text has been rendered in the NIV and its revisions since 1984.

Only one word has been changed in this verse from the 1984 NIV to the 2010 revision. “Men” has changed to “people.” The initial change occurred in TNIV 2002, and a marginal note was added to give the alternate interpretation from the NIV 1984. In the TNIV 2005 and in the NIV 2010, there is no indication in the notes at all about another possible interpretation of this text.

If my interpretation is correct, then *anthrōpois* should be rendered as “men” in the text of NIV 2011. Short of that, the marginal note that appeared in TNIV 2002 should be restored to show that there is another possible translation of the text. (online at <http://www.biblegateway.com/perspectives-in-translation/2010/12/how-should-we-identify-the-teachers-in-2-tim-22-denny-burk/>).

1 Timothy 2:12

**ESV: I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority [*authenthein*] over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.**

**NIV: I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.**

**NLT: I do not let women teach men or have authority over them. Let them listen quietly.**

The question here is whether or not the Greek *authenthein*, used only here in the NT, means to simply exercise authority, or to specifically exercise authority in an illegitimate way. The NIV decision to intentionally translate it in a way that could be interpreted as the latter, without even a footnote to suggest otherwise, is problematic. The NLT provides a footnote indicating it could be translated as the NIV has it.

The prohibition to “**exercise authority**” is clear enough, but to “**assume authority**” can imply that the Apostle was fine with women exercising authority over men in the church or home, just as long as she was given permission by a higher authority. This is, in fact, how egalitarian commentators take it.<sup>112</sup> And apparently, this was precisely how the NIV translation team intended it to be taken. Craig Blomberg who prepared the “Translator’s Notes” for the team comments on 1 Timothy 2:12:

The exercise of authority that Paul was forbidding was one that women inappropriately assumed, but whether that referred to all forms of authority over men in church or only certain forms in certain contexts is up to the individual interpreter to decide.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Regarding interpreters that take advantage of the ambiguity in the NIV translation of 1 Timothy 2:12 in order to support egalitarianism and Paul’s approval of women exercising authority over men in the church, see “Assuming Too Much about “Assume” in 1 Timothy 2:12” by Kevin DeYoung at:

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2010/12/07/assuming-too-much-about-assume-in-1-timothy-212/>.

<sup>113</sup> Craig Blomberg, “*NIV Translator’s Notes*”; online at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/wp-content/uploads/Translation-Notes-Final1.pdf>

Douglas Moo, chairman of the NIV translation committee, has said the following concerning 1 Timothy 2:12:

As one of the NIV translators, let me just make four comments. First, there is so much uncertainty about this key word that the accusation of "mistranslation" is simply not fair.

Second, the rendering "assume authority" was actually taken from Bill Mounce's commentary on the Pastorals; and Bill, as you will know, is a complementarian.

Third, the footnotes were dropped in the updated NIV simply because the translators believed that "assume authority" could be taken in either direction. We often use this phrase in a neutral way (e.g., "When will the new President assume authority"?).

Four, it is our intent to provide a translation that is faithful to the text, bowing to no particular theological agenda (in this case, neither "egalitarian" or "complementarian"). Our rendering of 1 Tim. 2:12 was sincerely intended as our best effort at rendering this very obscure word in a way that would not be driven by either theological agenda.<sup>114</sup>

Several responses are in order. First, it does not appear at all, that in the Greek literature *authentēin* can mean something like "assume" (NIV) or "usurp" (KJV) authority. George Knight, after a detailed discussion in his commentary, no doubt based on his lengthy article in the *New Testament Studies* journal entitled "Reference to Women in 1 Timothy 2:12,"<sup>115</sup> concludes:

Contrary to the suggestion of KJV's "to usurp authority" and BAGD's alternative, "domineer" (so also NEB), the use of the word shows no inherent negative sense of grasping or usurping authority or of exercising it in a harsh or authoritative way, but simply means "to have or exercise authority."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Douglas Moo, online at: <http://www.biblegateway.com/perspectives-in-translation/2010/11/whats-the-best-way-to-describe-the-authority-problem-in-1-tim-2-12-douglas-j-moo/>.

<sup>115</sup> George Knight, *New Testament Studies*, 30 (1984), 143-157.

<sup>116</sup> Knight, *Pastorals*, 141. I. H. Marshall has argued that "recent research . . . has produced over 300 uses of the word-group" even "to commit murder." (*The Pastoral Epistles* [T & T Clark, 1999], 456). In our opinion, it is because such a study expands its scope to include seemingly related words, that it can bend the meaning to their will. Dr. Moo answers:

And that is a problem for the NIV translators. They intentionally left something ambiguous, that, in spite of what Dr. Moo claims, is not ambiguous. The meaning of *authentein*, while used only here in the NT is well attested in ancient Greek literature, and its meaning is well documented by Dr. Knight. Not only that, but we consider the 288 page *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Baker, 2005), edited and contributed to by

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The verb translated in the NIV "have authority" (*authentein*) has generated a great deal of discussion. We will confine ourselves to three points that we think are most important.

First, the frequent appeal to etymology—the roots that make up the word—in explaining this word is understandable, given the limited number of relevant occurrences [of the actual word], but must always remain a precarious basis for conclusions. Not only is the etymology of the word debated, but also the usage of words often departs, in unpredictable ways, from their etymological meaning (e.g., the word *butterfly*).

Second, the occurrences of this word—the verb—that are closest in time and nature to 1 Timothy mean "have authority over" or "dominate" (in the neutral sense of "have dominion over," not in the negative sense "lord it over")."

Third, the objection that, had Paul wanted to say "exercise authority," he would have used the word *exousiazo*? does not bear up under scrutiny. Paul's three other uses of that verb hardly put it in the category of his standard vocabulary, and the vocabulary of the pastoral epistles is well known to be distinct from Paul's vocabulary elsewhere. For these reasons, we think the translation "have authority over" is the best English rendering of this word.

Again, we must ask the question of application. What kind of modern church practice would Paul be prohibiting to women in saying they are not to have authority over a man? . . . Clearly, then, Paul's prohibition of women's having authority over a man would exclude a woman from becoming an elder in the way this office is described in the pastoral epistles.

By extension, then, women would be debarred from occupying whatever position in a given local church would be equivalent to the pastoral epistles' governing elder (many churches, for instance, call these people deacons). This would be the case even if a woman's husband were to give her permission to occupy such a position, for Paul's concern is not with a woman's acting independently of her husband or usurping *his* authority but with the woman's exercising authority in the church over *any man*. ("What Does it Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?," in *Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, John Piper and Wayne Grudem, ed. (Crossway, 1991), 186-7.

Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas Schreiner, to be both exhaustive and irrefutable on the meaning of *authentain* and 1 Timothy 2:12.<sup>117</sup>

Secondly, we are confused by Dr. Moo's claim that the NIV translation decision came from William Mounce's Word Biblical Commentary on the Pastorals. On the contrary, Dr. Mounce concludes there: "Paul does not want women to be in positions of authority in the church; teaching is one way in which authority is exercised in the church."<sup>118</sup>

Thirdly, it was a serious mistake to drop the footnote informing the reader that there were options even in the minds of the NIV translators on the meaning of *authentain*.

Fourthly, against the accusations of many, I believe Dr. Moo when he says the translation was not driven by an egalitarian "theological agenda." Indeed, Dr. Moo himself, the chairman of the NIV translation committee, is a rather staunch complementarian. Ironically, in fact, he wrote a convincing essay arguing for a complementarian/traditional view of this very verse, 1 Timothy 2:12 in the monumental book, *Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, which the "Council on Biblical Manhood and Woman" sponsored and endorsed . . . as its first book project."<sup>119</sup> Accordingly, as noted above, no sane person should be accusing Dr. Moo of cowing to feminists' agenda's.

But his translation committee still made a significant and unfortunate mistake here. And it is just these kinds of mistakes that give critics of gender-inclusive translations reasons to believe there is a feminist, egalitarian motive behind them. These are critical texts regarding the roles of men and women in the church, and therefore, the NIV and NLT make serious errors here.

In summary, then, here is our tally of the gender-inclusive errors on the NIV and NLT. Of the three critical verses regarding gender roles discussed above, the NLT errs in one, is correct in

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<sup>117</sup> Also see *Andreas J. Köstenberger*, "Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11-15" (Ch 12) by Linda L. Belleville; online at <http://www.cbmw.org/Journal/Vol-10-No-1/Teaching-and-Usurping-Authority-1-Timothy-2-11-15-Ch-12-by-Linda-L-Belleville>

<sup>118</sup> William Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles (WBC)* (Thomas Nelson, 2000), 130. See also 120-30, esp. 124-26 and 128-30.

<sup>119</sup> *Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, John Piper and Wayne Grudem, ed. (Crossway, 1991), xv. See Douglas Moo, "What Does it Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?," 179-193.

another but adds an inaccurate footnote, and translates incorrectly but adds a clarifying footnote in the third. The NIV simply fails to accurately translate the author's original intention in all three texts and not even offering footnotes to inform of optional readings. This is what is maddening about deciding, "which is the best translation?" because not a single one of them is perfect!

Accordingly, it must be said, that, while we can find at most two or three instances where the NLT and NIV translators have mistranslated the original intentions of the biblical authors regarding gender, (and we don't believe others can find any more—we've read their stuff and disagree), there are *thousands* of examples where their gender-inclusive approach has made the Scriptures more accurate.

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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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### **Gauging Your Grasp**

- 1) What is the majority issue in the debate regarding gender-inclusive language in Bible translations?
- 2) What are the problems with Bible translations that do not include gender-inclusive language?
- 3) We claim that not only does gender-inclusive language more accurately reflect the original intentions of biblical writers, but it also better reflects English. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) What are aspects of contemporary English in America that demonstrate the better accuracy of gender-inclusive Bible translations?
- 5) What fact do we believe makes the critiques of gender-inclusive translations seem rather hypocritical? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) Why do we believe the critiques of gender-inclusive translations have been exaggerated and even slanderous? Do you agree or disagree and why?

## 15.3: Gender-inclusive Translations

- 7) What is an example of even the Apostle Paul using gender-inclusive translation?
- 8) What three instances in the NIV and NLT do we believe translators have made significant errors. Do you agree or disagree and why?

**Recommended Reading**

In addition to those listed in chapter 15.1

- *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism*, D. A. Carson (Baker, 1998). Although a little dated because it specifically addresses the NIVi (1996) that is out of print, it is still the best book on the issue and is quite contemporary because relatively the debate has continued even with the updated 2011 NIV.
- The website of the Committee on Bible Translation which is responsible for the NIV at <http://www.niv-cbt.org>

**Publications & Particulars**



## Chapter 15.4

# An Evaluation of Some Bible Translations

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### Table of Topics

#### **A) Evaluating Bible Translations**

#### **B) New International Version (NIV): *The best overall***

B.1) The NIV is still the best English Bible available

B.2) Scholarly endorsements of the NIV

B.3) The NIV's bumpy recent history

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#### **C) New Living Translation (NLT): *Very valuable***

C.1) The great things and one bad thing about the NLT

C.2) Illustrating the strengths of the NLT: *Rom 3:19-25*

C.3) Answering the critiques of the NLT

#### **D) English Standard Version (ESV): *Not needed***

#### **E) New American Standard Bible (NASB): *A good Bible***

#### **F) New English Translation (NET) *Kinda cool***

#### **G) King James Version (KJV): *Amazing heritage but obsolete***

#### **H) New King James Version (NKJV): *Missed opportunity***

#### **I) The Message Bible (Msg): *Not really a Bible at all***

### **Primary Points**

- A dynamic “thought for thought” translation would be the best choice to accurately convey what the original authors of the Scriptures intended.
- No one translation is all-sufficient
- If we had to pick one Bible translation, it would be the latest edition of the New International Version.
- Moises Silva, Professor of NT at Westminster on the NIV2011: “A sparkingly clear, yet judiciously conservative, English Bible for the twenty-first century.”
- Unfortunately, the NIV’s history in the last decade has been rather bumpy.
- Virtually all of the criticisms made of earlier editions of the NIV have been corrected in the NIV2011.
- Dr. Piper’s criticisms of the NIV are inaccurate.
- The NLT is equally valuable to the NIV because it reflects the best of a “dynamic” thought-for-thought approach to translation, its renderings are usually very similar to the latest NIV, and its translation team consists of a virtual “Who’s Who” of the finest Evangelical scholars today.
- Many of the criticisms against the initial NLT version (1996) have been corrected in subsequent revisions (2004, 2007).
- The ESV has changed the RSV it is based on to make it more gender-inclusive, in almost 700 instances. But it is no real improvement in

## A) Evaluating Bible Translations

From what has been argued so far we can offer some conclusions. First, if one could only have one translation, than a dynamic “thought for thought” translation would be the best choice to accurately convey what the original authors of the Scriptures intended. Secondly, because of the need to have contemporary English, gender-inclusive language is beneficial. Accordingly, our choices will reflect these convictions.

However, it should be said that no one translation is all-sufficient. We have several good ones available to us in American and we should use them. Good internet sources for several translations are available.<sup>120</sup> Along these lines, Drs. Fee and Strauss have offered their own recommendations on Bible versions<sup>121</sup> and have written:

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<sup>120</sup> Good internet sources for several translations are available online at <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage> and <http://biblos.com/>.

<sup>121</sup> Drs. Fee and Strauss write:

The NRSV is perhaps the most reliable of the formal equivalent versions and is well respected among biblical scholars. The NASB, NASU is the most consistently literal and so provides the most direct access to the form and structure of the Hebrew and Greek. The ESV is an improvement over the RSV, especially in light of its greater use of gender accurate language (see p. 97 above).

For a mediating version, which we believe to be the best general purpose Bible, the TNIV is perhaps your best choice. Like its predecessor, the NIV, it is a committee translation that draws on the best of evangelical scholarship. It improves on the NIV both in its gender accuracy and its exegetical precision. In the interest of full disclosure, we should remind readers that both authors serve on its translation committee (though we have also been involved with other versions).

The NET and NAB are also excellent and reliable versions. Like the TNIV, both are committee works representing a high level of biblical scholarship. The additional notes in the NET are particularly helpful for those doing detailed study. The NAB represents the best of Roman Catholic scholarship.

Functional equivalent versions are excellent reading Bibles, especially when reading entire books in one setting. By using natural and idiomatic English, they seek to make the text sound as clear and natural to modern readers as it sounded to the original readers. Functional equivalent versions are also helpful for detailed study, and especially as a complement to Hebrew and Greek study. This is because while literal versions tend to simply reproduce Hebrew and Greek grammatical forms, functional equivalent versions go further

Although meaning can never be reproduced perfectly, it can be rendered truly, that is, with a high degree of accuracy. What Bible readers need to take from this is that all Bible versions—no matter how accurate—have certain limitations. These can be overcome by (1) using more than one version to gain a better perspective; (2) reading larger units of text to determine the greater context and flow of thought; (3) checking good commentaries on difficult passages; and (4) gaining a better knowledge of the world of the Bible through studies of its background and culture.<sup>122</sup>

## **B) New International Version (NIV): *The best overall***

### **B.1) The NIV is still the best English Bible available**

I have to confess that I have some bias toward the NIV as it has been my reading and study Bible for over twenty years. Even though the NLT may be more accurate to contemporary English, I am use to the NIV. However, one will notice that in the 2011 version, much of it has been updated with more modern English and it reads much more similar to the NLT than the 1984 edition. All in all, it meets all of our criteria for the best translation.

We have argued throughout book 15 that a “thought for thought” (dynamic) approach to Bible translation is generally the best. This is what the NIV has provided perhaps better than any other English translation since its first publication in 1973, with subsequent updates in 1978 and 1984, and its latest edition in 2011. Accordingly, someone has accurately remarked:

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and clarify the “functional” relationships between phrases and clauses. In this way they answer the syntactical and exegetical questions advanced students are asking about the text.

There are many good choices among the functional equivalent versions. The NLT, especially in its 2004 revision, is accurate, clear, and readable. Like the TNIV and the NET, it is a committee work with a high level of scholarship behind its translation.

The NCV, GW, CEV, and GNT (TEV/GNB) are also good choices. The Message can provide fresh insights into the text and its application, but should always be used with other more historically accurate versions. (*How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions* [Zondervan, 2007], Kindle Locations 2623-2627.

<sup>122</sup> Fee & Strauss, 12.

The New International Version is today the most widely distributed and utilized translation in the world. It is a thought-for-thought translation, but employs a moderately traditional tone that makes it appropriate for both public worship and personal reading.<sup>123</sup>

We believe it is because the NIV has generally been both the most reliable (accurate to the ancient text) and readable (in modern, common English) that it has been by far the most popular translation. Regarding its reliability, it has been the work of some of the most respected Hebrew and Greek scholars in our generation. These include many of the authors of some of the most respected, conservative, Evangelical commentaries and Bible reference works available:

Gleason Archer, Kenneth Barker, Edmund Clowney, Ralph Earle, Gordon Fee, Francis Foulkes, Richard France, Richard Gaffin, R. Laird Harris, Everett F. Harrison, Ronald K. Harrison, Gerald Hawthorne, William Hendricksen, Walter Kaiser, Kenneth Kantzer, F. Derek Kidner, Simon Kistemaker, Meredith G. Kline, William Lane, Richard N. Longenecker, I. Howard Marshall, Thomas McComiskey, Douglas Moo, J. Ramsey Michaels, Leon Morris, Robert Mounce, Roger Nicole, John N. Oswalt, J. B. Payne, Charles Ryrie, Merrill C. Tenney, Bruce Waltke, Ronald Youngblood.<sup>124</sup>

Likewise, the translators for the NIV update in 2011 are equally respected Bible scholars including: Douglas Moo, Craig Blomberg, Gordon Fee, Bruce Waltke, William Mounce, Kenneth Barker, and Richard France.<sup>125</sup>

In regards to its readability, one only needs to compare its modern English to the KJV, NASB, ESV, or other more literal translations. If we had to pick one Bible translation, it would be the latest edition of the New International Version. Overall, it does the best job of translating the meaning of the original Hebrew and Greek into modern English, and that is what a Bible translation should do.

## **B.2) Scholarly endorsements of the NIV**

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<sup>123</sup> Excerpted from the official website of the NIV at <http://www.biblica.com/bibles/faq/13/>

<sup>124</sup> Michael Marlowe at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/nivtranslators.html>

<sup>125</sup> Ibid

Not only does the quality of scholars on the NIV translation committee speak for it, but other respected Bible scholars have spoken for it as well.

Moises Silva has been a longtime Professor of NT both at Gordon-Conwell and Westminster and a past President of the Evangelical Theological Society. He has written a well-known standard textbook on hermeneutics with co-author Walt Kaiser,<sup>126</sup> and a well-regarded commentary on Philippians in the *BECNT* series. For four decades Dr. Silva has been a translator or a consultant for five different Bible versions including the NASB, NLT, and ESV. His work on his Th.M. and Ph.D. degrees (the latter at the University of Manchester with F. F. Bruce, James Barr, and T. Muraoka) sought to integrate general linguistics (especially lexical semantics, bilingualism, and translation theory) with the study of the biblical languages. He writes of the updated NIV:

The appearance of the latest NIV edition (2011) is cause for celebration. From the very beginning, the NIV's greatest strength has been its balance, avoiding both literalism (which many confuse with accuracy but which in fact obscures the meaning of the text for contemporary readers) and loose paraphrasing (which may appear "relevant," but at the expense of reliability). This new edition succeeds admirably in bringing the translation up to date without altering its essential character.

The fine scholars behind this work, fully committed to the authority of Scripture and following standard principles and methods of translation, understand that their task is to ascertain the meaning of the text and then to find the clearest and most natural way of expressing that meaning in contemporary English. Their success is especially evident in their handling of the difficult problems raised by changes in the way that English speakers use gender-specific/inclusive language, based on the most thorough and reliable analysis of current usage, which has only recently become available.

Of course, one can always find individual renderings and decisions that are debatable — but this is true of all versions. What is undeniable, however, is the exceptional care and seriousness with which the NIV translators have sought to apply a coherent philosophy of translation to the biblical text.

The result is a sparkingly clear, yet judiciously conservative, English Bible for the twenty-first century. I use it with

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<sup>126</sup> Moises Silva and Bruce Waltke, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Zondervan, 2007).

pleasure as my first version of choice and unhesitatingly recommend it to others as a wonderful contribution to church life and personal spiritual growth. <sup>127</sup>

Likewise, one could hardly find a more respected OT scholar than Tremper Longman III. Dr. Longman has contributed to a number of commentaries, including the *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (The Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes), *NIV Application Commentary* (Daniel), *New International Biblical Commentary* (Jeremiah and Lamentations), and the *Baker Old Testament Wisdom* series (Proverbs). In addition, he was the senior translator for the wisdom books on the central committee that produced and now monitors the New Living Translation. He has participated in other Bible translations as translator and consultant including the Holman Christian Standard Bible, the New Century Translation. Dr. Longman writes of the updated NIV:

NIV 2011 is a gift to the church. As a professor of Old Testament and a translator myself, I understand and appreciate this version's fidelity to proper translation method. Its clear, readable English is accurate to the original languages, communicating the Bible's rich message in a way that will reach people of all ages, education, and spiritual maturity. Produced by the leading evangelical biblical scholars of the day, this Bible is suitable for devotions, deep study, casual reading, group study, and in the pulpit. <sup>128</sup>

Another well known NT scholar that has informally endorsed the NIV is Ben Witherington, Professor of NT at Asbury Theological Seminary and on the doctoral faculty at St. Andrews University in Scotland. His many "socio-rhetorical" commentaries on the NT are highly regarded, although we would strongly disagree with his strong Arminian/Methodist theological stance. Nevertheless, his views reflect our own very well. On his blog he writes:

There are many . . . issues to deal with when you update the best-selling Evangelical translation of the Bible in modern times—the NIV. In my view the NIV has many rivals, but no peers or superiors and for several reasons:

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<sup>127</sup> Moises Silva, online at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/niv-2011-overview/endorsements/>.

<sup>128</sup> Tremper Longman III at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/niv-2011-overview/endorsements/>.

1) it does not fudge on the text critical issues; 2) it tries to keep abreast of the growth and development of the English language; 3) it corrects previous mistakes found in the RSV, KJV, and older versions of the NIV etc.; 4) it uses good idiomatic English where warranted precisely because a woodenly literature translation is often more of an obstacle to understanding than an aide to it, especially in a Biblically illiterate age, and 5) on the whole it deals fairly with the issue of inclusive language, and does not make decisions based primarily on theological rationale, but rather on the basis of common English usage.

In other words, the theological debate is not decided by the translator, nor is a particular gender viewpoint read into the text as an agenda, unlike some other translations. . . . Indeed I like it much better for the above reasons than either the NKJV or the ESV.<sup>129</sup>

### **B.3) The NIV's bumpy recent history**

Unfortunately, its history in the last decade has been rather bumpy. After a minor update in 1984 (the version that most people are familiar with), in 1997 its publisher Zondervan planned to update it again, and this time make gender-inclusive changes. This was known as the NIVi. This plan was abandoned, primarily because of the sensational attacks levied on it as noted elsewhere.<sup>130</sup> At that time, several Bible scholars, including D. A. Carson, pleaded for honesty, accuracy, and reason in the debate. For one thing, as Dr. Carson noted: "It must be said that several inclusive language Bibles appeared without much fuss" including the NRSV in 1989, the CEV published by Thomas Nelson with the American Bible Society in 1995, and the NLT by Tyndale in 1996.

In a thorough review of the NIVi, Dr. Carson summarized:

[I]t appears the critics have scored some points in particular passages and the [NIV translation committee] should take the most telling of these criticisms seriously and be even more

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<sup>129</sup> Ben Witherington III online at <http://blog.beliefnet.com/bibleandculture/2010/11/the-niv-2011-and-inclusive-language.html>.

<sup>130</sup> Regarding the erroneous and sensational attacks on the NIV see section 15.3.B.

careful in the future than they have been. We can all learn from one another.

On the other hand, the sweep of the criticisms against the NIVi and other gender-inclusive translations will not stand. The undergirding understanding of language and translation (and occasionally even exegesis) is sufficiently flawed that the attack will not long prove successful or widely convincing.<sup>131</sup>

It would seem Dr. Carson underestimated the propaganda surrounding the critics of the NIV update as we described in the previous chapter.<sup>132</sup> We agree that the criticisms are “sufficiently flawed,” but “the attack” has continued even after two major revisions of the NIVi.

After the debacle that occurred with the NIVi in 1997, in 2005, Zondervan again attempted an update of the NIV which was referred to as Today’s New International Version (TNIV), and it was again heavily criticized. Afterwards, Zondervan admitted that they could have been more public about their intentions and purposes for the gender-inclusive update, and the NIV translation committee itself welcomed input on yet another revision that was completed in 2011. This version is simply referred to as the New International Version (NIV).

Most would agree that there were significant problems in a few instances in the TNIV. However, these have been substantially corrected in the latest NIV. So much so, that the great majority of the immense amount of analysis on websites such as that of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) is obsolete. Accordingly, the CBMW, perhaps the most vehement critics of the NIVi and TNIV, have stated in regards to the 2011 edition of the NIV:

First, we are grateful for the openness and honesty expressed by Zondervan and the CBT (NIV translation committee) during the early stages of this revision. Several private conversations were held long prior to the finalization of the work of the CBT (indeed, the CBT humbly solicited input from a number of sources), and the leadership at Zondervan was very forthright about their intentions and plan. Particularly to be commended are Zondervan President Moe Girkins and CBT Chairman Doug Moo. Their integrity from the

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<sup>131</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism*, D. A. Carson (Baker, 1998), 162-3.

<sup>132</sup> Regarding the erroneous and sensational attacks on the NIV see section 15.3.B.

very beginning of this process has set the stage for a respectful discussion of substance of this new translation.

Second, we are thankful that the CBT made some significant improvements in various areas. For instance, in many passages "man" and "mankind" replace a gender-neutral equivalent, resulting in greater accuracy in translating the Hebrew or Greek text. This is also true in many cases for the words, "he," "him," "his," "brother," "father," and "son." In numerous passages that now contain these words, the CBT revised many of the most egregious passages that concerned us previously.<sup>133</sup>

Indeed, Robert Slowley has meticulously documented the changes from the NIV1984, TNIV2005, and the NIV2011 versions.<sup>134</sup> In summary, the NIV2011 is about 40% different than the NIV1984. That is a very significant change. The great majority of it involves gender-inclusive issues (e.g. changing "brothers" to "brothers and sisters," etc.). Nevertheless, when you revise 40% of the most popular and well known Bible text in the world, great scrutiny and resistance is to be expected.

Mr. Slowley reports that the NIV2011 is about 8% different than the TNIV2005. This may seem minor when considering all the criticism the TNIV2005 received. And accordingly, some claim the NIV2011 is just a warmed-over version of the TNIV. But that is a falsehood because virtually all of that 8% change occurred specifically to address the criticisms of its gender-inclusiveness.

Accordingly, Mr. Slowley has developed a table entitled: "Word change statistics (CBMW)" and explains, "This page lists words of particular interest to the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood in the NIV1984, TNIV, and NIV2011, showing the word counts, and the number of verses where those words have been added or removed."<sup>135</sup> The results illustrate the great degree to which the NIV translators have listened to, and agreed with, the criticisms of the TNIV.

Remembering that groups like the CBMW disliked the use of "human beings" or "humans" to translate *anthrōpos* ["people,"

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<sup>133</sup> "CBMW Responds to New NIV(2011)" online at <http://www.cbmw.org/ Blog/posts/cbmw-responds-to-new-niv2011>.

<sup>134</sup> Robert Slowley, "NIV2011 comparison with NIV1984 and TNIV" online at [http://www.slowley.com/niv2011\\_comparison/](http://www.slowley.com/niv2011_comparison/)

<sup>135</sup> Robert Slowley, ""Word change statistics (CBMW)" online at [http://www.slowley.com/niv2011\\_comparison/cbmw\\_words.html](http://www.slowley.com/niv2011_comparison/cbmw_words.html)

"humans"], we note that in 157 instances these words have been dropped in the NIV2011. In fact, all 14 uses of "humankind" in the TNIV have been taken out.

Likewise, noting the CBMW's fondness for retaining the use of "man" and "men," we see these words have been added 138 times in the NIV2011. Even the word "mankind," which was never used in the TNIV, has been added 61 times in the NIV2011. Likewise, the masculine pronouns (he, him, himself, his), which such a fuss has been made over, were added 147 times to the NIV2011 text. Even the word "son" was added 16 times. Again, virtually all of the nearly 10% change in the NIV2011 from the 2006 TNIV has been focused directly on the wishes of the gender-inclusive critics.

First of all, we do not believe that some of the changes (e.g. changing "humankind" to "mankind") were warranted. In fact, we would suggest that many of the changes were an unnecessary and even mistaken concessions to critics, making the NIV2011 less reflective of modern English in America.

Secondly, the only, and supposedly the most problematic translation that the CBMW cites in the article regards the use of "**assume authority**" at 1 Timothy 2:12 which we have agreed elsewhere is a significant mistake.<sup>136</sup>

Thirdly, whatever significant issues remain for the CBMW have really to do with their rejection of "dynamic" translation, rather than gender-inclusive issues. And as we have argued in chapter 15.2, dynamic equivalency translations are superior to the formal equivalency that gender-inclusive critics promote.

Fourth, we will state again that we believe the NIV2011 is overall the best English Bible available for American Christians. However, with all the slander that has been waged against its predecessors, we wonder if it will ever recover. Accordingly, many may still opt for the NIV1984 version, which, while not reflecting the modern changes in English regarding referents to gender, does not incur the baggage and controversy that the NIV2011 may. While its publisher has stated that it will no longer produce the NIV1984, copies will certainly be available for a long time to come in print and on the internet.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Regarding the three significant mistakes that gender-inclusive translations have made see section 15.3.G.

<sup>137</sup> A very good electronic version of the 1984 NIV can be downloaded free at <http://pradis-niv-holy-bible.software.informer.com/>. It comes with a great search engine and excellent hyperlinked cross-references.



## B.4) Confronting John Piper's criticisms of the NIV

Unfortunately, if we are going to claim that the NIV2011 is still the best English Bible available, including being superior to the ESV, we need to deal with the criticisms of the rightly respected and popular Pastor, John Piper. Not only has he been one of the most outspoken critics of the NIV for years, he is definitely the most outspoken promoter of the ESV.

Even before the publication of the TNIV in 2005, Dr. Piper was very public about his criticisms of the NIV apart from the gender-inclusive issue. Again, the issue was his rejection of the "dynamic" ("thought for thought") approach to Bible translation. In an article entitled, "Why Bethlehem [Church] Uses the ESV" he writes:

The NIV makes up about 30% of all Bible sales. Among evangelicals the percentage would be far above 30% and is probably the Bible most evangelicals read most often. And the one most pastors use in preaching.

Why am I not on board? Not only am I not on board, I would be happy to see the NIV sail into the sunset if it could be replaced by the ESV as the standard preaching, reading, memorizing Bible of the English-speaking church. . . . I feel what I am about to say with a passion built up over 25 years. I have longed that there be something more readable than the NASB and more literal than the NIV. The NIV is a paraphrase with so much unnecessary rewording and so much interpretation that I could not preach from it.

My biggest concern has to do with preaching. When a paraphrase becomes the standard preaching, reading, memorizing Bible of the church, preaching is weakened—robust expository exultation in the pulpit is made more difficult. Preaching that gives clear explanations and arguments from the wording of specific Biblical texts tends to be undermined when a Bible paraphrases instead of preserving the original wording in good English.

And when that kind of preaching is undermined, the whole level of Christian thinking in the church goes down, and a Bible-saturated worldview is weakened, and the ability of the people—and even the pastors themselves—to root their thoughts and affections in firm Biblical ground diminishes.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> John Piper, "Good English With Minimal Translation: Why Bethlehem Uses the ESV" online at:

Whoa! First of all, it is unfair for Dr. Piper to again<sup>139</sup> refer to the NIV (or the NLT) as a “paraphrase,” as if only a formal equivalency revision of the RSV like the ESV deserves to be called a translation. Elsewhere we have noted the significant differences between a “thought for thought” translation and a paraphrase.<sup>140</sup>

Secondly, the claim that the ESV is significantly more “readable” English than the NASB is certainly debatable.<sup>141</sup>

Thirdly, note the rather sensational and we believe slanderous accusation that Dr. Piper is making against the NIV when he claims:

[P]reaching is undermined, the whole level of Christian thinking in the church goes down, and a Bible-saturated worldview is weakened, and the ability of the people—and even the pastors themselves—to root their thoughts and affections in firm Biblical ground diminishes.

On the contrary, we are sure it could be demonstrated that churches which use the NIV are producing disciples of Jesus Christ that are at least as godly, educated, and fruitful as those in Dr. Piper’s church. Likewise, there are many good preachers who speak with life-changing “robust expository exultation in the pulpit” using the NIV.

Dr. Piper goes on to list “four convictions at stake” in choosing the ESV over the NIV which we have already argued are rather meaningless.<sup>142</sup> He then lists “Examples of NIV Paraphrasing Compared to the More Literal ESV” that supposedly demonstrate that using the NIV instead of the ESV will mean:

[P]reaching is undermined, the whole level of Christian thinking in the church goes down, and a Bible-saturated worldview is weakened, and the ability of the people—and

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<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/good-english-with-minimal-translation-why-bethlehem-uses-the-esv>.

<sup>139</sup> Elsewhere Dr. Piper refers to dynamic translations as paraphrases, see section 15.2.D.1.

<sup>140</sup> Regarding the significant differences between “dynamic” translations and paraphrases see sections 15.1.C and 15.2.B-C.

<sup>141</sup> Regarding the weaknesses of the ESV see section 15.2.A and Mark Strauss, “Why the English Standard Version (ESV) Should Not Become the Standard English Version”; online at <http://bible-translation.110mb.com/improvingesv.pdf>.

<sup>142</sup> Regarding our response to John Piper’s four reasons that “literal” translations are superior to “dynamic” ones see section 15.2.D.1.

even the pastors themselves-to root their thoughts and affections in firm Biblical ground diminishes.

Do you think Dr. Piper demonstrates that in the list of examples from the NIV1984 that he offers?

### Romans 1:5

**ESV:** Through [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the obedience of faith (hupakoen pisteos)* for the sake of his name among all the nations.

**NIV1984:** Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to ***the obedience that comes from faith.***

The NIV2011 has retained this translation and for good reason. Check the commentaries. The NIV is a legitimate, and even clearer translation of Paul's meaning.

### Romans 3:20

**ESV:** ***By works of the law (ex ergon nomou)*** no human being will be justified in his sight.

**NIV1984:** No one will be declared righteous in his sight ***by observing the law.***

Remarkably, the NIV2011 has changed this to "**works of the law**" matching the wording of the ESV. But in our opinion this is not an improvement, for it leaves the meaning obscure. The NLT is better: "**For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands.**" Nevertheless, we wonder why Dr. Piper could not update his criticisms on his website to reflect the changes in the NIV2011.

### Romans 11:11

**ESV:** Did they stumble ***in order that they might fall (hina pesosin)***? By no means!

**NIV1984:** Did they stumble ***so as to fall beyond recovery?***  
Not at all!

The NIV2011 has retained the wording of the NIV1984, which matches the NLT, and again for good reason. The Greek word *piptō* means, “irretrievable spiritual ruin,”<sup>143</sup> a meaning that the ESV does not convey.

### Romans 13:8

**ESV:** *Owe no one anything* (*Medeni meden ophēilete*), except to love each other.

**NIV1984:** *Let no debt remain outstanding*, except the continuing debt to love one another.

There is neither a difference nor an error in the NIV1984 translation, and it was retained in the NIV2011.

### Hebrews 6:1

**ESV:** not laying again a foundation of repentance from **dead works** (*nekron ergon*)

**NIV1984:** not laying again the foundation of repentance from **acts that lead to death**.

Several commentators believe the NIV1984 translation (retained in the NIV2011) reflects the meaning very well. F. F. Bruce, in his NICNT commentary interpreted Hebrews 6:1: “They are probably not the works of the law . . . They are works which issue in death because they are evil”<sup>144</sup> That is pretty much what the NIV text says. Accordingly, the NIV translation is not only correct, but significantly better because it makes the author’s meaning clear.

### James 2:12

**ESV:** So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the **law of liberty** (*nomou eleutherias*).

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<sup>143</sup> See Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans (NICNT)* (Eerdmans, 1996), 687; and Thomas Schreiner, *Romans (BECNT)* (Baker, 1998), 593.

<sup>144</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews, NICNT* (Eerdmans, 1990), 139-40.

**NIV1984:** Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the **law that gives freedom**.

The NIV2011 retains this rendering. Again, we see no real distinction between the NIV and ESV here, but the NIV is again clearer, and in agreement with the interpretations of Drs. Moo and MacArthur on this text.<sup>145</sup>

### 1 Peter 1:20

**ESV:** **He was foreknown** (*proegnomenou*) before the foundation of the world.

**NIV1984:** **He was chosen** before the creation of the world.

The NIV2011 retains this rendering. Once again, the NIV is actually clearer, as it is widely recognized that God's foreknowledge (*prōegnomenou*) of people for salvation was more than just being aware of them, but included choosing them. Accordingly BAGD gives the meaning "choose beforehand" listing its use in 1 Peter 1:20 and several instances in Romans as examples.<sup>146</sup>

Not only do we fail to see the proof of Dr. Piper's rather outlandish accusations regarding the NIV, it could be argued that in all of the above instances the NIV is a better translation.

Then Dr. Piper lists "Two Examples of the Effects on Preaching" from the ESV instead of the NIV. Presumably he would pick the most egregious examples he can find. Do you think they demonstrate that if one uses the NIV:

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<sup>145</sup> Dr. Moo interprets:

No longer is the God's law a threatening, confining burden" (98), an interpretation that could easily be made from the NIV. Likewise, Dr. MacArthur interprets:, The admonition to **speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty** is tantamount to saying, "Live and act as a true believer who has been saved by God's grace and who will **be judged** on the basis of Christ's imputed righteousness. That righteousness frees the believer from the law of bondage and judges him under the redeeming **law of liberty**, God's Word of the gospel, the New Testament in Jesus Christ, which frees the repentant sinner from the bondage of sin (cf. John 8:31-32). (*The Letter of James, TNTC* [Eerdmans, 1985], James 2:12.

<sup>146</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), F. W. Danker, ed., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 2001).

[P]reaching is undermined, the whole level of Christian thinking in the church goes down, and a Bible-saturated worldview is weakened, and the ability of the people—and even the pastors themselves—to root their thoughts and affections in firm Biblical ground diminishes?

Here is Dr. Piper's first example:

John 11:5-6

**ESV:** Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **So, (oun) when he heard that Lazarus was ill,** he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

**NIV1984:** Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick,** he stayed where he was two more days.

Dr. Piper writes:

It is impossible to make the point from the NIV that Jesus' delay is an *expression* of love for Mary and Martha and Lazarus, and thus draw out the point that love sometimes does hard things because seeing the glory of God is a more precious gift than being sick or even dead.

Dr. Piper makes a good point, and one that Dr. Carson points out as well.<sup>147</sup> Which is probably why this hasn't been the NIV translation since 2005 when the NIV translation committee changed it in the TNIV to reflect the point that Drs. Piper and Carson are making. And this corrected reading has been maintained in the 2011 edition.

But even if the change had not been made, does the NIV1984 translation of this text do all the horrible things Dr. Piper claimed? And again, perhaps if this is one of the two most egregious errors Dr. Piper wished to use to claim the horrible consequences of the NIV, perhaps he could at least update his website to give the NIV translators credit.

Dr. Piper's second example is as follows:

Romans 8:35-36

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<sup>147</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), 407.

**ESV:** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? (36) As it is written, "For your sake **we are being killed** (*thanatoumetha*) all the day long."

**NIV1984:** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake **we face death** all day long."

Dr. Piper writes:

From the NIV translation one could argue from a health, wealth, and prosperity "gospel" that "famine and nakedness" will not happen to God's children (as they seem to in verse 35) because the Old Testament support that Paul quotes in verse 36 only says "we face death," but not that we really "are being killed." So the paraphrase "face death" removes an utterly crucial argument that Paul gave and that the preacher needs to make the true point that true Christians really do get killed and really do face famine and nakedness.

First, of all, none of the seven modern commentaries on Romans I've consulted correct the NIV here (retained in NIV2011), and one uses the NIV translation to make the very point that Dr. Piper wishes to make.<sup>148</sup> This is because "facing" something doesn't mean what Dr. Piper wants to make it mean. It certainly does not exclude in most minds the actual experiencing of something. Accordingly, Webster's Dictionary defines the verb "face" as:

to confront impudently; to meet face-to-face or in competition; to recognize and deal with straightforwardly; to master by confronting with determination; as in "face the music": to meet an unpleasant situation, a danger, or the consequences of one's actions.<sup>149</sup>

Certainly sounds like experiencing something to us. Accordingly, Dr. Piper's claim that, "the paraphrase [sic] "face

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<sup>148</sup> The Romans commentaries consulted included Moo, Schreiner, Stott, Barrett, MacArthur, Bruce, and Edwards, the latter of which used the NIV text to make Dr. Piper's point.

<sup>149</sup> *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*, ed. Fredrick Mish (Merriam-Webster, 1986), 433.

death" removes an utterly crucial argument that Paul gave" is not only rather sensational, but wrong.

We have gone to considerable lengths here to defend the updated NIV because this, the most popular English Bible, is worth defending. Infinitely more conservative, Evangelical, and scholarly effort has been invested in it than any other version, and this is especially so compared with the ESV. Overall, it is the best modern English translation of the Bible that humans can muster, and therefore, it is overall, the best communication of what God intended to say through His messengers.

## **C) New Living Translation (NLT): *Very valuable***

### **C.1) The great things and one bad thing about the NLT**

In my opinion, the second best English translation of Scripture is the NLT. There are reasons that as of 2012 it is the 4<sup>th</sup> best selling English Bible, and at times has been the very best selling version since its publication.<sup>150</sup> First, it reflects the best of a "dynamic" thought-for-thought approach to translation. Secondly, its renderings are usually very similar to the latest NIV and sometimes even identical. Thirdly, its translation team consists of a virtual "Who's Who" of the finest Evangelical scholars today.

These include: Daniel Block (Penteteuch editor), Gordon Wenham (Genesis), Tremper Longman III (Wisdom books editor), Richard Pratt (Psalms 1-75), Raymond Ortlund and Willem VanGemeeren (Psalms 76-150), John Oswalt (Prophets editor), John Oswalt and John Walton (Isaiah), Grant Osborne (Gospels and Acts editor), Craig Blomberg and Donald Hagner (Matthew), Gary Burge and Philip Comfort (John), D. A. Carson (Acts), Douglas Moo and Thomas Schreiner (Romans and Galatians), Harold Hoehner and Moises Silva (Ephesians), Greg Beale and Robert Mounce (1-3 John

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<sup>150</sup> See list in section 15.1.A. Wikipedia reports:

In July, 2011 the NLT held 3rd place in Bible sales based upon dollar sales and 2nd place based on unit sales according to the Christian Booksellers Association. In July, 2008, the NLT gained the #1 spot in unit sales, unseating the NIV for the first time in over two decades. (online at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Living\\_Translation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Living_Translation))

We would suggest that these fluctuations have been dependent on how the NIV is doing.

and Revelation). In addition, F. F. Bruce is listed as a "special reviewer."<sup>151</sup>

One will notice that the above scholars are the authors of the most respected commentaries available today, and one could hardly imagine a more skilled group of translators. Which is perhaps why Mark Norton, Managing Editor for the NLT remarks: "Because of the extensive efforts of world-class Bible scholars, the *New Living Translation* is the most expensive translation project in the history of Bible translation."<sup>152</sup>

One scholarly recommendation comes from Dr. Fee who describes the NLT as: "In general . . . a clear, accurate, and reliable translation."<sup>153</sup> Another writer has remarked: "A recent translation that is gaining widespread acceptance and uses contemporary terminology is the New Living Translation. It is both accurate and very readable."<sup>154</sup> In addition, in especially the 2007 edition, "Many marginal notes were added to help the reader study manuscript differences and to show the relationship between a literal translation and the rendering in the NLT."<sup>155</sup>

My greatest critique of the NLT is its handling of 1 Corinthians 12-14 and its failure to properly distinguish between Paul's intentional exchange between the use of *glosse* ("tongue") and *glossais* ("tongues"). I have argued elsewhere that it can be demonstrated that Paul is using the former to generally refer to the pagan, obscure, and counterfeit version of the gift operating in Corinth, and the latter is used exclusively to refer to the authentic gift itself. In fact, you might think charismatics led the translation of this passage.<sup>156</sup>

Nonetheless, I would certainly recommend the NLT for all uses, including Bible study, preaching the Bible, reading, and memorization. Particularly for new or young believers, there is no

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<sup>151</sup> Online at <http://www.newlivingtranslation.com/05discoverthenlt/meetthescholars.asp>.

<sup>152</sup> ref. unknown.

<sup>153</sup> Fee & Strauss, *Translation*, Kindle Location 2558.

<sup>154</sup> <http://www.biblica.com/bibles/faq/13/>

<sup>155</sup> <http://newlivingtranslation.com/05discoverthenlt/faqs.asp?faq=3#go3>.

<sup>156</sup> Regarding the NLT's mistaken translation of 1 Corinthians 12-14 see chapter 12.8 of *Knowing Our God*. For an explanation from one of the translators on this topic see online at <http://www.nltblog.com/index.php/2008/09/tongues-or-unknown-languages-in-1-cor-12-14>.

better Bible than the *New Believer's Bible* in the NLT with tremendous study helps.

## C.2) Illustrating the strengths of the NLT: *Rom 3:19-25*

Not only does the scholarly attention to the original texts make the NLT exceedingly reliable, its great strength is its readability. For example, notice the clarity of Romans 3:19-25 in the NLT:

**Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses and to bring the entire world into judgment before God. <sup>20</sup>For no one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what his law commands. For the more we know God's law, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying it.**

**<sup>21</sup>But now God has shown us a different way of being right in his sight—not by obeying the law but by the way promised in the Scriptures long ago. <sup>22</sup>We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done.**

**<sup>23</sup>For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard. <sup>24</sup>Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins. <sup>25</sup>For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us.**

Where the NASB and ESV translate the more traditional "**justification** [*dikaïoumenoi*]" (v. 24), the NLT has "**God . . . declares us not guilty.**" Where the NASB and ESV translate the more traditional "**redemption** [*apolutrōseōs*]" (v. 24), the NLT reads, "**freed us by taking away our sins,**" which is a good translation.<sup>157</sup> And while the NASB and ESV use the rather obscure "**propitiation** [*ilastērion*]" (v. 25), the NLT simply and wonderfully explains what it means by translating "**God sent Jesus to take the**

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<sup>157</sup> For the meaning of "**redemption**" in Romans 3:24 see Moo, *Romans*, 229.

**punishment for our sins and to satisfy God’s anger against us. We are made right with God.”**

I realize many prefer the more traditional theological terms, and even think the NLT is being subversive of authentic Christianity by not using them, but in my opinion, the NLT uses better 21<sup>st</sup> century English, which, as argued in chapter 15.1, is a critical attribute of a good translation. As NT scholar Craig Blomberg notes: “The . . . problem is that probably no more than 1 in 100 Americans have any clue as to the meaning of either “expiation” or “propitiation.”<sup>158</sup> Actually, that may be true of 1 in 100 Christians.

Accordingly, Mark Strauss has written:

Formal equivalent [“literal”] versions must recognize that if most readers cannot infer the meaning of the text, then the translation has failed. Consider the difficulties surrounding the translation of the Greek term *hilastērion* in Romans 3:25.

RSV: whom God put forward as an **expiation** by his blood, to be received by faith.

ESV: Whom God put forward as a **propitiation** by his blood, to be received by faith.

NASB: whom God displayed publicly as a **propitiation** in His blood through faith.

NIV: God presented him as a **sacrifice of atonement**, through faith in his blood.

NLT: For God sent Jesus **to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God’s anger against us.**

The Greek cognates *hilastērion* (Rom. 3:25), *hilasmos* (1 John 2:2; 4:10), and *hilaskomai* (Heb. 2:17) come from the language of the Old Testament sacrificial system. There has been a historical debate over whether the terms should be translated “expiation” or “propitiation.” The former carries the sense of satisfaction for sins through an atoning sacrifice, while the latter includes both atonement and appeasement of God’s wrath. The 1952 RSV was strongly criticized for rendering “expiation,” presumably leaving out the dimension of appeasement. The NASB and the ESV sought to correct this by translating “propitiation.”

But is this an appropriate solution? Very few readers – even Christian readers – have any idea what “propitiation” means. Of course they could consult a dictionary, but my computer

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<sup>158</sup>

Craig Blomberg, online at <http://www.biblegateway.com/perspectives-in-translation/2010/11/how-do-we-best-convey-hilasterion-in-rom-325-craig-blomberg>.

dictionary does not include the noun, and defines the verb only as “to appease or conciliate someone or something.” My desk dictionary – a 1500 page Webster’s – gives only the definition “to appease.” This means even an intelligent reader would miss the primary sense of sacrificial atonement, unless they consulted either a more comprehensive dictionary or a Bible commentary.

One has to question whether “propitiation” is an adequate *English* translation if readers cannot deduce the meaning even by consulting a dictionary. Translators would do better simply to transliterate the Greek *hilastērion* in the text than to give an English word like propitiation which is meaningless most readers.

If *hilastērion* indicates both atonement and appeasement, the NLT is the most accurate, since it reproduces the full sense: **“to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God’s anger against us.”** This is evidence that [“literal”] word-for-word [translation] does not necessarily mean greater precision or accuracy. The NLT uses fourteen English words to express the same meaning as a single Greek word!<sup>159</sup>

### C.3) Answering the critiques of the NLT

And contrary to critics—that is a very good thing if communicating the original meaning of the biblical authors is the goal instead of preserving archaic Biblish. All of which is why I love to have unbelievers read this passage from the NLT when I am sharing the Gospel with them. It is the clearest communication of the Gospel among all English Bibles.

The vast majority of criticisms leveled at the NLT have been nothing more than a disagreement with the “thought-for-thought” dynamic approach to translation, and a promotion of the more traditional “literal” translations. But as we have argued throughout this book, this is actually a great strength of the NLT, and a significant weakness of the ESV and NASB.

Many purists scoff at the NLT, perhaps thinking it is just a slight revision of its ancestor, the *Living Bible* paraphrase. But the NLT is a completely new translation directly from the most updated

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<sup>159</sup> Mark Strauss, “Form, Function, and the “Literal Meaning” Fallacy in Bible Translation”; online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/Strauss.LiteralFallacy.pdf>.

Hebrew and Greek texts. While some of the wording of the Living Bible remained in the 1996 edition, this has been drastically reduced in the subsequent 2004 and 2007 updates. Even so, many scholars have found little, if anything, wrong with many of the translations offered in the Living Bible.

Likewise, many of the criticisms against the initial version (1996) have been corrected in subsequent revisions (2004, 2007).

<sup>160</sup> A plus for me is that since the beginning, the NLT has retained

<sup>160</sup> For example, Michael Marlowe on his website, Bible Research, writes:

Three years ago I published a review of the 1996 New Living Translation, in which I pointed out some of the more important inaccuracies of the version. The problems were considerable [really?], even to the extent that one of the NLT's own translators had written, "I never recommend it to anyone except to supplement the reading of a more literal translation to generate freshness and new insights, unless they are kids or very poor adult readers."

I am glad to report now that in the 2004 revision most [actually, every single one] of the problems I identified and discussed in my earlier review have been rectified. There is a substantial increase in accuracy throughout the version, and the version's "schmaltsy" quality has been toned down quite a bit also. The editors at Tyndale house are to be commended for this improvement, which will contribute to a more accurate knowledge of the Word of God among those who use the New Living Translation. (online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/nlt2.html>)

First, the "NLT translator" who would "never recommend" it was Craig Blomberg, and he wrote this critique in 2003 before the 2004 and 2007 revisions (see [online at http://www.denverseminary.edu/article/the-word-of-god-in-english-criteria-for-excellence-in-bible-translation](http://www.denverseminary.edu/article/the-word-of-god-in-english-criteria-for-excellence-in-bible-translation)).

Secondly, if one reads through Mr. Marlowe's critiques of the 1996 edition, every single one of the verses he criticized were addressed in the 2004 NLT, not just "most." All of which is why we wonder why Mr. Marlowe would maintain his critiques of the 1996 version on his website, when they are now obsolete.

Robert J. Stewart's critique, whoever he is, has always been obsolete and illustrates some of the less than scholarly evaluations of the NLT that can be found on the net. Mr. Stewart writes:

The *New Living Translation* (NLT) is straight from Hell. , NLT advertises with the slogan, "Accuracy you can trust." Unfortunately, the NLT is not very accurate. The fact that the word "begotten" has been wrongfully removed from John 3:16 should be enough reason for every Christian to trash their NLT. In fact, I would rip it into shreds first to ensure that no one else is poisoned by it. ("The NLT Exposed" [http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Bible/NLT/nlt\\_exposed.htm](http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Bible/NLT/nlt_exposed.htm))

the translation “**virgin**” for the Hebrew *alma* at Isaiah 7:14, as does the NIV, NASB, and ESV.

So, no, the NLT is not a paraphrase, but perhaps the best translation available for 21<sup>st</sup> century English. For example, while the NASB, ESV, and even NIV are considered to be at a 12+ reading level for Ephesians 1, the NLT is at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level for this passage,<sup>161</sup> which seems like a good thing to me when helping people *understand* what the original writers meant is deemed as a foundational purpose of Bible translation.<sup>162</sup>

## D) English Standard Version (ESV): *Not needed*

The impetus to publish the ESV (2001) came from those who disagreed with the decision to make the NIV more gender-inclusive. As already noted, this is somewhat ironic. The ESV is based on the text of the RSV, yet in almost 700 instances changes have been made to the RSV text to be more gender-inclusive.<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, the smear campaign on the NIV leveled by those involved in publishing the ESV has certainly helped it to gain popularity with particularly Reformed preachers. John Piper’s very intentional promotion of it has been a main force behind this.<sup>164</sup>

Many wonder why we need the ESV and fail to see how it is superior in any way to the NASB, or the NIV1984 or NIV2011 for that matter. First of all, the texts of the ESV and NASB are often rather identical, as should be expected when they are both “literal” translations of the same texts. Secondly, many don’t like the fact that the ESV is essentially a warmed-over revision of the RSV (1952). David Dewey remarks: “The ESV is best described as a

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Actually, Mr. Stewart’s critique applies to most modern English Bibles and consulting any good commentary will expose his error.

<sup>161</sup> I read this somewhere on a rather “official” internet site but cannot find it now.

<sup>162</sup> For further information on the NLT see online at <http://www.newlivingtranslation.com/default.asp>

<sup>163</sup> Source online at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/wp-content/uploads/cbt-response-to-cbmw-review.pdf>. For examples in Matthew and Romans, see “The Gender-Neutral Language of the *English Standard Version* (ESV), Compiled by Mark L. Strauss, PhD; online at <http://bible-translation.110mb.com/esvlinks.htm>.

<sup>164</sup> Regarding John Piper’s promotion of the ESV and criticism of the NIV see section 15.2.D.1

light revision of the RSV. . . no more than 3-4 percent of the RSV text has been translated.”<sup>165</sup> In contrast, the NRSV was a much more thorough translation which improved greatly on the RSV. Accordingly, Drs. Fee and Strauss remark: “The NRSV is perhaps the most reliable of the formal equivalent [“literal”] versions and is well respected among biblical scholars.”<sup>166</sup>

Finally, no one has been able to convincingly say why the ESV is an improvement over the NASB. It does not capitalize personal pronouns referring to God or Christ like the NASB does. John Piper, the foremost promoter of the ESV practically equates the two and can only say that the ESV has a “greater degree of clarity of expression.”<sup>167</sup> Not all would agree. Even one of its promoters thinks he is saying something good when he remarks on the ESV: “Its English recalls the classic diction of the KJV, and so it has some literary power.”<sup>168</sup> It is unclear what “literary power” means, but if it does have the “diction of the KJV” than it is not good, clear, modern English which is essential to a good translation for American Christians.

Accordingly, in 2008, NT Professor Mark Strauss presented a paper before the Evangelical Theological Society entitled, “Why the English Standard Version (ESV) Should Not Become the Standard English Version” in which he detailed the significant lack of clarity in the translation. He introduced the paper with the following remarks:

I like the ESV. I am writing this article, however, because I have heard a number of Christian leaders claim that the ESV is the “Bible of the future”—ideal for public worship and private reading, appropriate for adults, youth and children. This puzzles me, since the ESV seems to me to be overly literal—full of archaisms, awkward language, obscure idioms, irregular word order, and a great deal of “Biblish.” Biblish is produced when the translator tries to reproduce the form of the Greek or Hebrew without due consideration for how people actually write or speak. The ESV, like other formal equivalent

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<sup>165</sup> David Dewey, *A User's Guide to Bible Translations*, (Intervarsity, 2004), 188.

<sup>166</sup> Fee and Strauss, Kindle Locations 2623-2627.

<sup>167</sup> John Piper, “What Bible Translation Does John Piper Recommend”; online at <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/what-bible-translation-does-john-piper-recommend>.

<sup>168</sup> Michael Marlowe, online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/esv.html>.

versions (RSV; NASB; NKJV; NRSV), is a good supplement to versions that use normal English, but is not suitable as a standard Bible for the church. This is because the ESV too often fails the test of "standard English."<sup>169</sup>

Others have demonstrated translation problems in the ESV as well.<sup>170</sup> In general, the words of Charles Spurgeon regarding the English Revised Version (the British counterpart of the 1901 ASV) might also be said of the ESV: "Strong in Greek, but weak in English."<sup>171</sup>

Like Dr. Strauss, we do not wish to unnecessarily impugn the ESV. It is the word of God, and no English translations of the Bible are perfect. Nonetheless, with the accuracy of the NASB to the form and wording of the Greek text, and the availability of the scholarly versions in modern English such as the NIV and NLT, we didn't need another revision of the RSV.

## **E) New American Standard Bible (NASB):** *A good Bible*

The NASB was the most popular Bible in America before the NIV was published in 1978 and its 1995 update has removed the original's "thee's" and "thou's." I also like the fact that the translators capitalize personal pronouns referring to God or Christ.

As stated elsewhere, I do not believe it is a superior "study" Bible to either the NIV or the NLT because its meaning is not as clear and for real "in-depth" study several translations, the ancient texts, and good commentaries are much, much better.

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<sup>169</sup> Mark Strauss, "Why the English Standard Version (ESV) Should Not Become the Standard English Version"; online at <http://bible-translation.110mb.com/improvingesv.pdf>.

<sup>170</sup> We have noted weaknesses in the ESV in section 15.2.A. For additional critiques of the ESV see the heading "translation problems" at <http://bible-translation.110mb.com/esvlinks.htm>.

<sup>171</sup> Quoted by Marlowe at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/nasb.html>.

Nonetheless, a good interlinear NASB with the transliterated Greek text can be found here.<sup>172</sup>

## **F) New English Translation (NET)** *Kinda cool*

The NET is essentially a product of Dallas Theological seminary staff. Its unique value is the over 60,000 text critical and translation notes explaining and defending various options. An electronic, downloadable version can be purchased for around \$20.<sup>173</sup> Its net version (pun intended by creators) can be accessed here.<sup>174</sup>

## **G) King James Version (KJV):** *Amazing heritage but rather obsolete*

D. A. Carson has written: "All translations are temporary. This is because the receptor language changes; there are no exceptions."<sup>175</sup> This would seem obviously true of a translation published in 1611. I do not desire to offend anyone who reveres this English Bible, and we should never forget all the ways the King James Version advanced the Kingdom of God on Earth for many generations. As someone has described it, "The King James Version is loved for the majesty of its language and for the way God has used it in ministering to millions down through the centuries."<sup>176</sup>

Nevertheless, we have claimed that, at a foundational level, the best Bible translation is one that most accurately translates the original Hebrew and Greek texts (i.e. reliable) into *your language* (i.e. readable). The latter is precisely why the 1611 KJV is not a good translation for any English speaking people today. In addition, the KJV translators were limited to relatively very few "Byzantine"

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<sup>172</sup> A good interlinear NASB with the transliterated Greek text can be found here [http://www.studybibleforum.com/htm\\_php.php3?do=show\\_marg\\_and\\_gh&b=52&c=4&v=4](http://www.studybibleforum.com/htm_php.php3?do=show_marg_and_gh&b=52&c=4&v=4).

<sup>173</sup> For downloadable versions of the NET Bible see <http://store.bible.org/category.asp?CategoryID=11&ParentID=3>

<sup>174</sup> <http://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Matthew+1>

<sup>175</sup> Carson, 72.

<sup>176</sup> <http://www.biblica.com/bibles/faq/13/>

manuscripts which have been proven to be less reliable than the updated texts we have today based on significantly earlier and more numerous original manuscripts. In spite of those who insist all other translations but the KJV come from the devil, the real facts expose the KJV as rather obsolete.<sup>177</sup>

## **H) New King James Version (NKJV):** *Missed opportunity*

A group of primarily conservative Baptists undertook the project of "modernizing" the KJV, and it was published in 1982. At the time, the updated UBS and NA Greek texts were available, yet the translators used the same relatively deficient "Byzantine" texts that the original KJV was based on in 1611. That was a mistake that makes the NKJV not as good as it could be. If you really want a more "literal" translation, the NASB or ESV are significantly more accurate.

## **I) The Message Bible (Msg):** *Not really a Bible at all*

Beyond the "dynamic," "thought for thought" translation which endeavors to stick close to the literal meaning of Greek text while rendering it in English phrases, there are a number of paraphrases. The most popular one recently is Eugene Peterson's *The Message* (2002). For reasons mentioned earlier, I would not recommend it as a Bible at all.<sup>178</sup> First, as with other paraphrases (LB, JBP) it is the work of one man. Secondly, I simply find that Mr. Peterson's "translation" does not reflect the Greek very well and his desire to provide "cool" English for Scripture often actually obscures the text and distracts from its true meaning. If one wants a more modern and "fresh" English translation, the NLT and CEV are more reliable, and real translations made by teams of scholars. Accordingly, David Dewey notes: "*The Message* is a paraphrase that people either love or loathe. Previous examples of the genre, such as LB or the work of J. B. Phillips, look tame in comparison."<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> For further study regarding the KJV see James White, *The King James Only Controversy* (2009) and D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (1978).

<sup>178</sup> Regarding the *Message Bible* see section 15.2.B.

<sup>179</sup> Dewey, 182.



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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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### ***Gauging Your Grasp***

- 1) We have argued that one particular Bible would be the one we would choose if we only had one option. Which translation would that be? Why is this our choice? Do you agree or disagree and why? What translation would you choose if you could only have one?
- 2) Briefly describe the “bumpy history” of the NIV since 1997.
- 3) What do we claim about the NIV2011? How do we demonstrate this? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) We claim that Dr. Piper’s criticisms of the NIV are inaccurate. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) Why do we also promote the NLT? Do you agree or disagree on its value and why?

### ***Publications & Particulars***



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## Chapter 15.5

# Recommended Resources for Scripture Study

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### Table of Topics

- A) The Bible
- B) What About Learning Hebrew & Greek?
- C) Purchasing Resources
- D) Internet Resources
- E) Bible Software
- F) Topical Bibles and Cross References
- G) Language Resources
- H) Instruction on Bible Interpretation
- I) Commentaries
- J) Theological Study
- K) Bible Encyclopedia
- L) Encouragement for Study

**Table 15.5: Projected Cost of "Most Valuable" Resources**

During a recent teaching on understanding Scripture at a Pastor's conference, it was suggested I write up a list of resources I would recommend on the topic. The following represents my opinion on the matter. An experienced opinion, but still an opinion. I want to say that up front so I don't have to repeat it throughout what follows. Nonetheless, I sure wish someone had put together a similar list for me twenty years ago when I started studying Scripture in detail. Hope it helps.

I own and use many, many more resources, commentaries, and theologies than those listed below, but my purpose here is to suggest what I believe is the "best of the best" and essential.

There are two primary reasons I use the following resources: 1) Understanding the text to better ensure I am teaching it accurately for Sunday morning messages; 2) Theological writing. Only one of these categories may interest you so I have marked and categorized the resources as follows:

- ◆ Most valuable for teaching purposes
- Most valuable for theological purposes

But as noted in the next section-don't forget to *read* the Bible itself!

## **A) The Bible**

By far my most life changing and instructional study of Scripture has come from simply meditating on the English text of Scripture itself. Relatively very, very few of my most exciting and transforming discoveries about God (theology), the Bible, myself, marriage, parenting, pastoring, and life in general have come from other books such as commentaries, theologies, reference tools, sermons, articles, etc, or any other of the approximately 1700 Christian books I've read or the dozens more I've consulted.

I've read the best, most respected, and influential Christian writing in the Church's history, including many Church Fathers, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, several Puritans, Spurgeon, Edwards, Hodge, Warfield, Packer, MacArthur, Piper, Carson, and the list could go on and on. And I tell you that all of it combined has not even come close to educating and changing me as much as Scripture. Don't be tempted otherwise.

We must never forget this and should always study the English text of Scripture more than everything else. It is absolutely

amazing how deep and rich Scripture is, and how the same verse or passage can yield new life changing power with every reading. None of this should surprise us when we remember that the Author of Scripture is God and all else is written by mere men.

While we have evaluated certain Bible translations in the previous chapters, and have claimed some are superior to others, *all* of them are more valuable than all of the man-made resources discussed below.

## **B) What About Learning Hebrew & Greek?**

I do not desire to offend anyone with my opinion on this matter. Many have a great deal of time, expense, and effort invested in the study of the Greek and Hebrew languages. I'm just don't believe it is as critical as some make it.

Seminaries have made a living claiming that any respectable Teacher of God's word must know Greek and Hebrew grammar. This seems to be often exaggerated. It is very valuable to know Greek and Hebrew *definitions* and a good lexicon (dictionary) will give the options of meanings. But Greek grammar, for example (i.e. tense, mood, voice, gender, aspects, declensions, breathings, etc.), is another thing.

First of all, there are a multitude of very good commentaries that go into great detail on the Hebrew and Greek texts, including their grammar, and they can tell you everything you need to know. Secondly, our English translations have been produced by the foremost Hebrew and Greek scholars in the world. The men writing commentaries and making translations have studied these languages for many years and are experts, and we can benefit from their knowledge instead of obtaining it ourselves.

Studying Greek and Hebrew grammar is like brain surgery. If you're not going to become an expert, then you're bound to do damage. Unless you want to devote at least a decade (no exaggeration) to focused study on Hebrew or Greek to gain an expert understanding, don't mess with it. In fact, gaining a beginner's or intermediate level of knowledge in the grammar of these ancient languages may be dangerous as it gives you a confidence in your ability to translate that you should not have. Accordingly, Greek scholar Moises Silva, Professor of NT at Westminster has written:

A successful translation requires: 1) master of the source languages—certainly a much more sophisticated knowledge than one can acquire over a period of four or five years [which

is typical for even a seminary education]; 2) superb interpretation skills and breadth of knowledge so as not to miss the nuances of the original. (*The Challenge of Bible Translations* (Zondervan, 2003), 52)

Is it really your goal to become so proficient that you can improve on the translations and commentaries we have today? Why spend a few years to gain a beginner's understanding when the experts' work and knowledge is available to us? If we're going to claim that we need to become fluent in Hebrew and Greek grammar, then we had better become experts in textual criticism as well and not trust the Hebrew and Greek texts (apparatus') established by scholars.

Finally, I've studied the most respected commentaries on the Greek text and rarely do they even attempt, let alone convincingly argue, to correct our English translations. Likewise, I've read the "Exegetical Insights" in William Mounce's *Basics of Biblical Greek* that are designed to demonstrate why a knowledge of Greek grammar is vital to properly interpreting Scripture. They do not convince me, and again, any such "insights" of real significance will be in a good commentary.

In my opinion, the whole promotion of learning Greek and Hebrew grammar can be an expensive (in money, but especially time), unnecessary, and potentially misleading head trip. Teachers who overuse Greek and Hebrew grammar in their preaching are not attractive to me, drawing far too much attention to themselves, and necessarily implying that our English translations are not good enough. Such an atmosphere takes us back to the days in the corrupt Roman Catholic Church when the Scriptures were stolen from the people by existing only in Latin so that the Church could insist that only the experts could correctly understand Scripture.

Use the English translations recommended in this book, buy some of the Hebrew and Greek lexicons and good commentaries described below, and you will be fully equipped to **"accurately handle the word of truth"** (2 Tim 2:15).

## C) Purchasing Resources

I think Amazon.com is in general the best place to buy books. I buy a lot of them used. As a Pastor I get a 25% discount from my local Christian bookstore but Amazon is usually cheaper. Their reviews are helpful as well. And their Kindle reader (which can be downloaded onto your PC), with the option of downloading (and

returning!) many books instantly makes it a slam dunk. In addition, you will find that Amazon is considerably cheaper than Logos. I've provided links to places to purchase the books that can be simply copied and pasted into your browser.

As demonstrated in the table at the end, all of the "most valuable" resources recommended below can be purchased for under \$1000. In my opinion, these are valuable "tools of the trade" if you have the responsibility of teaching Scripture. No doubt an auto mechanic has to spend a lot more on the tools of their trade.

## **D) Internet Resources**

I note several very valuable and free references on the internet for the study of Scripture. In fact, before you purchase any classic Christian reference check for free versions online first, especially at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org). Most notable is the fact the commentaries and systematic theology of Charles Hodge, one of my favorites, is available free online. However, particularly in the area of commentaries, lexicons, and Bible encyclopedias/dictionaries, the stuff on the net is usually old and outdated.

## **E) Bible Software**

I generally would not recommend purchasing Bible software such as Quickverse or Logos, both of which I own. They are expensive, and much of the material is second rate, outdated, or already online, such as Bible translations. However, the ability to purchase specific titles from Logos does help in obtaining some very good resources that are only offered in electronic versions here. And their Libronix platform can be downloaded free so that you do not need to purchase Logos' expensive packages but order individual titles. But with the increase of Kindle products at Amazon, they are becoming an even better option for electronic resources than Logos.

## **F) Topical Bibles and Cross References**

Perhaps the most important Bible study tools of all for both sermon preparation and theological study:

### **◆ *Nave's Topical Bible***

Free online at <http://www.biblegateway.com/topical/>

◆ ***The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*** (cross references)

Free online at <http://www.studylight.org/com/tsk/>

## G) Language Resources

The following are absolutely amazing resources that are free on the Internet.

- ***Greek text with many translations, Greek definitions, and cross references***

Use all the hyperlinked resources here for a wealth of information.  
<http://interlinearbible.org/matthew/1-1.htm>.

- ***NET Bible with translator notes, other translations, and articles***

<http://net.bible.org>

- ***NASB with Greek definitions and concordance***

[http://www.studybibleforum.com/htm\\_php.php3?do=show\\_arg\\_and\\_gh&b=52&c=4&v=4](http://www.studybibleforum.com/htm_php.php3?do=show_arg_and_gh&b=52&c=4&v=4).

As noted above, I have found good Greek or Hebrew dictionaries (lexicons) to be very helpful in understanding Scripture. Translations cannot always catch the full meaning of a word and must choose between what may be several options. Which is why studying a number of translations is helpful as well. Unfortunately, to my knowledge, good lexicons are not available for free online. Therefore, the following are worth purchasing:

- ◆ ***Vine's Complete Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words***

An essential and cheap reference tool. William Mounce has published a newer lexicon, but it is not an improvement over the "old" *Vine's*. Our knowledge of Greek hasn't advanced considerably since Dr. Vine published (1968). A cheap electronic version (\$17) is available at:

<http://www.logos.com/product/1223/vines-complete-expository-dictionary-of-old-and-new-testament-words>, and a Kindle version is available for \$20 at Amazon.com.

- ***New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)***

This four volume set edited by Colin Brown is a considerable step up from a dictionary like *Vine's*. But especially if you are doing theological study or writing, this is essential. You can find an electronic version for as little as \$40 used, but you may need to spend more like \$80. An example can be found at [http://www.amazon.com/International-Dictionary-Testament-TheologyWindows/dp/0310216656/ref=tmm\\_other\\_title\\_0?ie=UTF8&qid=1308436906&sr=1-2](http://www.amazon.com/International-Dictionary-Testament-TheologyWindows/dp/0310216656/ref=tmm_other_title_0?ie=UTF8&qid=1308436906&sr=1-2).

■ ***Theological Workbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)***

This can be considered the OT counterpart to the *NIDNTT*. Again, for theological study it is worth the price. A hardcopy can be obtained for about \$40 from Amazon at [http://www.amazon.com/Theological-Wordbook-Testament-GleasonArcher/dp/0802486495/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308437105&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Theological-Wordbook-Testament-GleasonArcher/dp/0802486495/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308437105&sr=1-1).

An electronic version is available from Logos for about \$50 at <http://www.logos.com/product/1102/theological-wordbook-of-the-old-testament>.

- ***A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature*** (better known as BAGD after the last names of its editors, Bauer, Arndt, Gingerich, Danker). This is the premier Greek dictionary listing every known use of a word in all of ancient Greek literature that we possess. If you're in a real debate on the meaning of a word, this is helpful. But expensive. Logos has a great electronic version for about \$150 which is not much more than the cost of a hard copy at:

[http://www.amazon.com/Greek-English-Lexicon-Testament-Christian-Literature/dp/0226039331/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1325860323&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Greek-English-Lexicon-Testament-Christian-Literature/dp/0226039331/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1325860323&sr=1-1)

- ***Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)***

I have used the more massive 10 volume set edited by Gerhard Kittel and do not think it is significantly better than the *NIDNTT*. The latter sufficiently summarizes the more detailed information in the *TDNT*. In addition, while both works originated from rather liberal German scholars, the *NIDNTT* is edited by the more conservative Colin Brown and he has authored several of the articles describing the theological meanings and uses of NT Greek words.

## H) Instruction on Bible Interpretation

### ◆ *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart

\$13 in Kindle version at

[http://www.amazon.com/How-Read-Bible-All Worth/dp/0310246040/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308448240&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/How-Read-Bible-All-Worth/dp/0310246040/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308448240&sr=1-1)

- **Moises Silva & Bruce Waltke, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning***

Basic and practical. Available at [http://www.amazon.com/Hermeneutics-Principles-Processes-Biblical-Interpretation/dp/0801031389/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308449312&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Hermeneutics-Principles-Processes-Biblical-Interpretation/dp/0801031389/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308449312&sr=1-1)

- ***Exegetical Fallacies*, D. A. Carson**

More advanced but interesting and instructive. Available at

[http://www.amazon.com/Exegetical-Fallacies-D-Carson/dp/0801020867/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308448762&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Exegetical-Fallacies-D-Carson/dp/0801020867/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308448762&sr=1-1)

- ***The Hermeneutical Spiral*, Grant Osborne**

Quite advanced but very complete. Available at

[http://www.amazon.com/Hermeneutical-SpiralComprehensive-IntroductionInterpretation/dp/0830828265/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308448987&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Hermeneutical-SpiralComprehensive-IntroductionInterpretation/dp/0830828265/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308448987&sr=1-1)

## I) Commentaries

The foundational purpose of a commentary is to help you accurately understand the text. Their usefulness coincides with the “teaching” or “theological” categories.

A good “teaching” commentary should give a substantial explanation (“exposition”) of the text, including any helpful cultural background.

For “theological” commentaries you want to know any significant controversies about the translation or interpretation of the Greek text, including the strengths and weaknesses of various options. A valuable bonus is offering insights into the theological meaning and significance of the text. This is more rare, as good Greek scholars are not always good theologians.

Fortunately, the best commentaries are not the most expensive ones. I've spent \$60 to \$100 for some of my commentaries and they are not as helpful as some costing less than \$10 used. Price has little to do with quality when it comes to commentaries for a teaching Pastor, let alone a theological writer.

Two good resources for evaluating NT commentaries for primarily "theological" purposes are:

- ***New Testament Commentary Survey*, D. A. Carson, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., 2007.**
- ***Commentary & Reference Survey*, John Glynn, 10<sup>th</sup> ed., 2007**

However, much of their insight is shared below.

A commentary is only as good as its author. Accordingly, I do not generally purchase sets of commentaries, but rather acquire the commentaries of my favorite authors. My favorite commentary authors for "teaching" commentaries are John Stott and John MacArthur. Accordingly, there are only two complete commentary sets I would strongly encourage someone to buy:

♦ ***Bible Speaks Today series*, ed. John Stott**

Especially worth it because John Stott covers several NT documents in the set including Sermon on the Mount, Acts, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Pastorals, and 1 John. Unfortunately, the rest of the volumes don't have near the quality, illustrating our point above that a commentary is only as good as its author. But Stott's works make it worth purchasing the entire NT set in a CD-rom for around \$70 at Amazon (\$99 a Logos):

[http://www.amazon.com/Bible-Speaks-Today-Testament-CD-ROM/dp/0830824480/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1327504305&sr=1-2](http://www.amazon.com/Bible-Speaks-Today-Testament-CD-ROM/dp/0830824480/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1327504305&sr=1-2)

♦ ***MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*.**

It's almost \$300, but if you have a responsibility to teach the Scriptures there is a lot of help here. A Kindle edition is available for \$286 at:

[http://www.amazon.com/MacArthur-New-Testament-Commentary-Set/dp/0802498434/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1327435209&sr=1-2](http://www.amazon.com/MacArthur-New-Testament-Commentary-Set/dp/0802498434/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1327435209&sr=1-2)

While I believe it is best to choose commentaries by author, here are the sets that most often produce the best, conservative, Evangelical NT “theological” commentaries:

- ***New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT)*, Gordon Fee ed.**
- ***Pillar New Testament Commentary (PNTC)*, D. A. Carson ed.**
- ***New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)*, eds. Marshall and Gasque**
- ***Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (BECNT)***

If I do not list a particular commentary for a biblical book below, usually one from these series will be sufficient.

Other commentary sets that I could recommend include:

- ***Barnes’ Notes on the Old Testament and New Testament***

Written in the 1800’s, and Barne’s was a little controversial on some points. But this is often well worth a look. The NT and parts of the OT are available free at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/barnes/ntnotes.toc.html>.

- ***Homilies by John Chrysostom***

These are worth looking at to get a glimpse of the best Bible Teacher around 400 A.D. Available online at: <http://www.ccel.org/index/author/C>

- ***Calvin’s Commentaries, John Calvin***

The most influential “teaching” commentaries for centuries. Insights are often interesting, and noted in more and better commentaries. Available online at: <http://www.ccel.org/index/author/C>

My favorites for more “theological” commentaries vary according to the book of the Bible, but Charles Hodge and D. A. Carson are my favorites. Dr. Carson often answers the kinds of questions I’m asking, whereas many commentaries don’t even try.

Even though Dr. Hodge wrote his commentaries (only Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Ephesians) in the 1800’s, modern authors often

have little to add. While they are free online, these versions are fairly clunky to navigate (with the exception of the ccel version of Ephesians). Using "control F" on the page may help at least to go to a particular chapter. In addition to the editions noted below, all four commentaries are available in electronic format from Logos for \$75. Don't purchase the \$1 Kindle versions at Amazon as they do not have hyper-linked table of contents and are not easy to access. Perhaps the best options currently are the paper backs- they are worth it in my opinion.

I have not studied some of the books of Scripture in detail so I cannot recommend commentaries for every book, even in the NT. Nonetheless, in regards to "theological" commentaries, I would recommend the following.

## **Matthew**

### ■ **D. A. Carson, (*EBC*)**

This is the only commentary in the whole *EBC* series worth having and it is the best commentary on Matthew. I have about 15 commentaries on Matthew, including the \$100 *ICC* three volume set by Davies and Allison. And Carson is better than all of them. Unfortunately this is not easy to get anymore, but well worth having. Perhaps you can find the 1986 2 vol. version used, or buy the new version coupled with Mark for about \$25 at:

[http://www.amazon.com/Matthew-Mark-Expositors-Bible-Commentary/dp/0310268923/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308413257&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Matthew-Mark-Expositors-Bible-Commentary/dp/0310268923/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308413257&sr=1-1)

## **John**

### ■ **D. A. Carson, (*PNTC*)**

It is \$48 at Logos and Available in Kindle edition for \$28 at Amazon:

[http://www.amazon.com/Gospel-according-Pillar-Testament-Commentary/dp/0802836836/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308416953&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Gospel-according-Pillar-Testament-Commentary/dp/0802836836/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308416953&sr=1-1)

## **Romans**

### ■ **Douglas Moo (*NICNT*)**

*NICNT* commentaries are not available on Logos. \$40 at Amazon at:

[http://www.amazon.com/Epistle-Romans-International-Commentary-Testament/dp/0802823173/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308417159&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Epistle-Romans-International-Commentary-Testament/dp/0802823173/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308417159&sr=1-1)

### ■ **Charles Hodge**

While navigation is a little clunky, it is available free online at:

<http://librex.us/commentaries/hodge/index.html>.

A paperback edition for \$22 is available at:

[http://www.amazon.com/Romans-Crossway-Classic-Commentaries-Charles/dp/0891077243/ref=ntt\\_at\\_ep\\_dpt\\_1](http://www.amazon.com/Romans-Crossway-Classic-Commentaries-Charles/dp/0891077243/ref=ntt_at_ep_dpt_1)

### **Thomas Schreiner, (*BECNT*)**

Worth the price and available for \$25 at:

[http://www.amazon.com/Romans-Baker-Exegetical-Commentary-Testament/dp/0801021499/ref=sr\\_1\\_12?ie=UTF8&qid=1327511326&sr=8-12](http://www.amazon.com/Romans-Baker-Exegetical-Commentary-Testament/dp/0801021499/ref=sr_1_12?ie=UTF8&qid=1327511326&sr=8-12)

## **1 Corinthians**

I own a lot of resources on this book and am disappointed by most of them because of their support or openness to charismatic theology. For example, Gordon Fee's (*NICNT*) is the most popular but he is a Pentecostal and it definitely affects his interpretation. John MacArthur's commentary is quite helpful on this book.

### ■ **Anthony Thiselton's (*NIGTC*)**

A very good, much more in-depth resource on many topics, although I don't always agree with his conclusions.

\$85 electron version at Logos. \$53 hardcover at Amazon at:

[http://www.amazon.com/Epistle-Corinthians-International-Testament-Commentary/dp/0802824498/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1327436464&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Epistle-Corinthians-International-Testament-Commentary/dp/0802824498/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1327436464&sr=1-1)

### ■ **Charles Hodge**

Still one of the best. Online free at:

<http://www.davidcox.com.mx/library/H/Hodge,%20Charles%20%20-%201%20Corinthians.pdf>

Paperback edition available for \$21 at:

[http://www.amazon.com/1-Corinthians-Crossway-Classic-Commentaries/dp/0891078673/ref=ntt\\_at\\_ep\\_dpt\\_3](http://www.amazon.com/1-Corinthians-Crossway-Classic-Commentaries/dp/0891078673/ref=ntt_at_ep_dpt_3)

## **Ephesians**

### ■ **Peter O'Brien (PNTC)**

\$42 for electronic version at Logos. Kindle version for \$26 available at Amazon:

[http://www.amazon.com/Letter-Ephesians-Pillar-Testament-Commentary/dp/0802837360/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308423667&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Letter-Ephesians-Pillar-Testament-Commentary/dp/0802837360/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308423667&sr=1-1)

### ■ **Charles Hodge**

A PDF version you can save on your computer, or a good online version with hyperlinked table of contents is available free online at:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/hodge/ephesians.html>

### **Harold Hoehner (BECNT)**

Excellent example of a detailed but usable commentary on the Greek text, but I do not always agree with conclusions.

Unavailable at Logos. \$38 at Amazon:

[http://www.amazon.com/Ephesians-Exegetical-Commentary-Harold-Hoehner/dp/0801026148/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1317667903&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Ephesians-Exegetical-Commentary-Harold-Hoehner/dp/0801026148/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1317667903&sr=1-1)

## **Pastoral Epistles**

### ■ **George Knight, (NIGTC)**

\$54 at Logos. Kindle version available for \$32 at Amazon:

[http://www.amazon.com/Pastoral-Epistles-Commentary-International-Testament/dp/0802823955/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308429925&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Pastoral-Epistles-Commentary-International-Testament/dp/0802823955/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308429925&sr=1-1)

## **Revelation**

My comments here are similar to those regarding 1 Corinthians. Most commentaries on Revelation are amillennial

or pretribulational, or rather allegorical in nature, and therefore, miss much of the important, literal meaning of this book concerning the future of the Church. This is why, although I own the expensive tomes by Beale and Osborne, I don't believe they are worth the money. While not as detailed, the following are good commentaries of a more premillennial/literal view of Revelation.

■ **Robert Mounce (*NICNT*)**

Unavailable at Logos. Available in Kindle edition for \$26 at Amazon:

[http://www.amazon.com/Book-Revelation-International-Commentary-Testament/dp/0802825370/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308432464&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Book-Revelation-International-Commentary-Testament/dp/0802825370/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308432464&sr=1-1)

■ **George Ladd**

[http://www.amazon.com/Commentary-Revelation-John-George-Eldon/dp/0802816843/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308432517&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Commentary-Revelation-John-George-Eldon/dp/0802816843/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308432517&sr=1-1)

## **OT Commentaries**

■ **C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch**

Keil and Delitzsch's 10 volume set has been the classic Evangelical commentary on the OT for decades and remains so. If you are going to study the OT in any depth, it is worth purchasing. Although you may be able to purchase a used hard copy version for less, you can buy it here for \$70:

<http://www.christianbook.com/delitzsch-commentary-testament-volumes-updated-edition/c-f-keil/9780913573884/pd/73884>.

An electronic version for \$120 is available here:

<http://www.logos.com/product/5790/keil-and-delitzsch-commentary-on-the-old-testament>.

## **J) Theological Study**

I currently own about 10 systematic theologies and most of them have their strengths and weaknesses. Unfortunately, therefore, I cannot recommend just one that is overall the best.

■ ***Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter Elwell ed.**

Very helpful articles from very respected scholars on many topics. Logos electronic version \$60. Amazon hardcover \$25 at: [http://www.amazon.com/Evangelical-Dictionary-Theology-Reference-Library/dp/0801020751/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1327437667&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Evangelical-Dictionary-Theology-Reference-Library/dp/0801020751/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1327437667&sr=1-1)

■ **Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology***

By far the most popular today. Dr. Grudem does a very good job on most topics but there is a considerable focus on charismatic theology that could seriously mislead someone. As I've said, every man has his blind spots. \$40 at Logos. Kindle edition available for \$31 at Amazon:

[http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb\\_sb\\_noss?url=searchalias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=Wayne+Grudem%2C+Systematic+Theology&x=0&y=0](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=searchalias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=Wayne+Grudem%2C+Systematic+Theology&x=0&y=0)

■ **Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, 3 vols.***

Probably the best systematic theology ever written (but dated). Dr. Hodge trained the best Bible teachers in America for 100 years through "Old" Princeton Seminary and his writings. He was the "John MacArthur" and "John Piper" of his generation. About my only disagreement is Dr. Hodge's postmillennialism. Available free with good navigation online at:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/hodge/theology1.html>.

Logos has an electronic version available for \$35 at:

<http://www.logos.com/product/619/systematic-theology>

I would not recommend the Kindle versions at Amazon because they do not have a hyper-linked table of contents for navigation like the version offered above at ccel.

If you want a helpful condensed version that deletes the Latin texts of the original for \$30 see:

[http://www.amazon.com/Systematic-Theology-Charles-Hodge/dp/0875522246/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1327509500&sr=1-3](http://www.amazon.com/Systematic-Theology-Charles-Hodge/dp/0875522246/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1327509500&sr=1-3)

■ **Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith***

Very sound and covers some topics that others don't, and other topics better than some. This is strongly Reformed in perspective which may be a turn off to some. While I disagree with Dr. Reymond's defense of infant baptism and amillennialism, his text is very much worth reading. Kindle edition available for \$25 at:

[http://www.amazon.com/New-Systematic-Theology-Christia n-Faith/dp/0849913179/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308440684&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/New-Systematic-Theology-Christia n-Faith/dp/0849913179/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308440684&sr=1-1)

### **Donald Bloesch, *Christian Foundation Series***

By far one of the most prolific, knowledgeable, and readable theologians in the history of the Church. While I do not agree with Dr. Bloesch on everything (he likes Barth), all of his volumes are truly worth purchasing.

### **Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology***

The best historical review of theology in the Church. Very good for a background knowledge of theology.

[http://www.amazon.com/Christian-Theology-Introduction-Alister-McGrath/dp/1444335146/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308441489&sr=1-2](http://www.amazon.com/Christian-Theology-Introduction-Alister-McGrath/dp/1444335146/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308441489&sr=1-2)

## **K) Bible Encyclopedia**

These give interesting and valuable historical and cultural background. As noted above there are many old ones available on the Net, but in my opinion the following is worth the cost:

### ■ ***International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ed. Bromiley)***

There is a lot of very interesting and helpful information here. Not as colorful as many encyclopedias with a lot of pictures, but articles are written by some of the most conservative and respected scholars. A hard copy set can be purchased for \$100 here:

[http://www.christianbook.com/the-international-standard-bible-encyclopedia-vols/9780802837851/pd/81602?item\\_code=WW&netp\\_id=154576&event=PPCSRC&view=details](http://www.christianbook.com/the-international-standard-bible-encyclopedia-vols/9780802837851/pd/81602?item_code=WW&netp_id=154576&event=PPCSRC&view=details)

An electronic version can be downloaded at Logos for \$130 here:

[http://www.amazon.com/International-Standard-Bible-Encyclopedia-Wbeerdmans/dp/0802837816/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308439053&sr=1-2](http://www.amazon.com/International-Standard-Bible-Encyclopedia-Wbeerdmans/dp/0802837816/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308439053&sr=1-2)

## **L) Encouragement for Study**

For those with a teaching/intellectual bent who desire to use their mind for the service and glory of God, the following can be especially encouraging and instructive.

**Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians***

A brief, classic, and important reminder for young scholars about humility and the place of theology in ministry.

[http://www.amazon.com/Little-Exercise-Young-Theologians/dp/0802811981/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308446847&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Little-Exercise-Young-Theologians/dp/0802811981/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308446847&sr=1-1)

**A. G. Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life***

One of the few books I've read more than once. Just read the reviews here and you will know why:

[http://www.amazon.com/Intellectual-Life-Spirit-Conditions-Methods/dp/0813206464/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308446103&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Intellectual-Life-Spirit-Conditions-Methods/dp/0813206464/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308446103&sr=1-1)

**Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It***

[http://www.amazon.com/Fit-Bodies-Fat-Minds- Evangelicals/dp/0801038707/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308447480&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Fit-Bodies-Fat-Minds- Evangelicals/dp/0801038707/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1308447480&sr=1-1)

**Table 15.5: Projected Cost of “Most Valuable” Resources**

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Cost</b>
<b>T e a c h i n g</b>	Multiple Bible translations	Online	Free
	<i>Nave’s Topical Bible</i>	Online	Free
	<i>The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge</i>	Online	Free
	<i>Vine’s Complete Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words</i>	CD-ROM	20
	<i>How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth</i> , Fee & Stuart	Kindle	15
	<i>Bible Speaks Today</i> Commentary series, ed. Stott	CD-ROM	70
	<i>MacArthur’s New Testament Commentary</i>	Kindle	285
<b>“Teaching” Total</b>			<b>\$390</b>
<b>T h e o l o g y</b>	NET Bible with translator notes, other translations, and articles	Online	Free
	<i>New International Dictionary of NT Theology (NIDNTT)</i>	CD-ROM	80
	<i>Theological Workbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)</i>	Hardcover	40
	Matthew, Carson (EBC)	Hardcover	25
	John, Carson (Pillar)	Kindle	28
	Romans, Douglas Moo (NICNT)	Hardcover	40
	Romans, Hodge	Online	Free
	1 Corinthians, Thiselton’s (NIGTC)	Hardcover	53
	1 Corinthians, Hodge	Online	Free
	Ephesians, O’Brien (PNTC)	Kindle	26
	Ephesians, Hodge	Online	Free
	Pastorals, Knight, (NIGTC)	Kindle	32
	Revelation, Mounce (NICNT)	Kindle	26
	Old Testament, Keil & Delitzsch	10 vols.	70
	<i>Evangelical Dictionary of Theology</i> , Wayne Grudem, <i>Systematic Theology</i>	Hardcover	25
	Wayne Grudem, <i>Systematic Theology</i>	Kindle	31
	Hodge, <i>Systematic Theology</i>	Online	Free
	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>	Hardcover	100
<b>“Theology” Total</b>			<b>\$576</b>

<b>Total for "Most Valuable" Resources Recommended</b>	<b>\$966</b>
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## Training Timothy's

*Equipping the next generation of Bible Teachers*

For further Bible and theological resources from Pastor Kurt Jurgensmeier see his website at **[www.trainingtimothys.org](http://www.trainingtimothys.org)**.

Titles offered in the **Advanced Theology** section include:

- Book 1: *Biblical Truth* (in process)
- Book 2: *Biblical Philosophy*
- Book 3: *Biblical Authority*
- Book 4: *Biblical Psychology*
- Book 5: *Biblical Apologetics*
- Book 6: *Biblical Faith*
- Book 7: *God's Revelation*
- Book 8: *God's Apostles*
- Book 9: *God's Prophets*
- Book 10: *God's Miracles- Works & Words*
- Book 11: *Human Miracle Working*
- Book 12: *The Truth About Tongues*
- Book 13: *Human Tradition & Divine Revelation*
- Book 14: *The Myth of Mega Mysticism*
- Book 15: *Bible Translations & Study Tools*
- Book 16: *The Bible Canon* (in process)
- Book 17: *A Biblical View of Endtime Events* (in process)
- Book 18: *Theological Papers*
- Book 19: *Theological Bible Commentary*
- Book 20: *Theological Bibliography*

Resource offered in the **Life Theology** section include:

*The Way, the Truth, & the Life Devotionals*

Audio files from sermons & conference speaking